

Money & Lifestyle (28.8.1984)

by Peter Maiden

This sermon explores the biblical principles for a Christian lifestyle, emphasizing the importance of stewardship, creation, and the Decalogue.

Duration: 49:27

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Luke 4:18, Luke 14:33

Topics: "Money"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses several principles from the Bible that should guide the lifestyle of Christians. One principle is the compassionate requirement to help the needy, as seen in the example of gleaning in the olive grove. Another principle is the Shema, which emphasizes loving God with all one's heart, soul, and strength. The speaker also highlights the importance of living in a way that does not degrade others or waste the resources of the world. Finally, the speaker shares a personal anecdote about modeling one's life after someone else, emphasizing the impact of positive role models.

Transcript

What is the actual title of this session? Can anybody tell me? I know it's Lifestyle, but what is the actual title? It's Money and Lifestyle. Use? Questions. Questions of Money and Lifestyle.

That's the title of the session. Some Biblical Guidelines. Thank you very much.

All Christians claim to have received new life from Jesus Christ. That's the claim of every Christian. And the question we want to look at together this morning, and we just don't have time to look at it properly, but I want to introduce you to this question.

What lifestyle, what style of living is appropriate for those who claim to have received new life in Jesus Christ? I think you would agree that if we claim that life is new, we would expect that the lifestyle should be new as well. But what are to be the characteristics of this new lifestyle? And in particular, how is our lifestyle as Christians to be distinguished from the lifestyle of those who make no Christian profession? That's the one question we want to look at. What should be the difference between Christian lifestyle and the lifestyle of the non-Christian? Now let me tell you a little secret about getting something out of a session in this room.

The secret is not to concentrate on that door, but to concentrate on this table. Because there will be coming and going, I can assure you, I've preached here many, many times, there will be coming and going throughout the session as people on the first morning try to find their way around this very interesting little building. So, it's going to take quite a bit of concentration, and I have quite a lot to say.

So, concentrate hard. Those are the questions we're going to look at. We've got new life, what should be new about our lifestyle? And how should this lifestyle be distinguished from the lifestyle of the non-Christian? Let's begin at the point where we must begin the consideration of all such questions.

And that is, what does the Bible say about this matter? I could listen to your ideas, you could listen to my ideas, and no doubt we could have a very interesting discussion. And with this subject, I would think we could have quite an emotional discussion. So, let's go to something which is much more safe than my ideas or your ideas.

Let's go to the Bible and see what the Bible has to say. I think we have to concede that the majority of us in the evangelical church have been very slow indeed, and I would include myself, we've been very slow to face what the Bible says about lifestyle. Frank Geberlein, who died recently but until then was a prolific writer on this subject, wrote these words.

With all our devotion to the Bible, we evangelicals have not been biblical enough to resist the pressures around us. We are very zealous for bringing people to Christ, and he adds, I say that without disparagement, but we have neglected essential parts of Scripture in which God sets forth what He requires of us in our relationships to our neighbours. Our fault has been and still is an unbiblical selectivity in the preaching, reading, and application of the Word of God.

Well, I wonder if that's true. We evangelicals who love the Bible, who love to distribute the Bible, are we still being selective in how we read it and apply it? Well, let's face Scripture head on and let's begin with the Old Testament. What does the Old Testament say about lifestyle? Does it give you any instructions whether you should buy a bigger and better motor car than the one you have on your OM team? Does it tell you whether you should upgrade your lifestyle by getting a bigger house, a better house? Does it say to the Manchester team, it's time you moved out of Danzig Street and to the Cooperative Insurance Society, which is a tremendous, beautiful, high-rise building along... Does it say anything like that to us, the Old Testament? Of course it doesn't.

The Old Testament does not specify exactly what your lifestyle should be. But what the Old Testament does, and it's very important, is it gives us the principles by which we must measure our lifestyle. And I want to mention six principles from the Old Testament.

They're not original. They're the principles which many preachers and writers have used before. Number one is the account of creation in Genesis chapter 1 and 2. What did God say when he made human beings? This is what God said.

Let's make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and over the livestock, over all the earth, all the creatures that move along the ground. So, having this intention, God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him.

Male and female, he created them. Now, of course, sin has marred that image of God in man. It's marred it.

But it's extremely important for us to realize that sin has not destroyed God's image in man. Every man, everyone is still a bearer of the image of God. And it's this doctrine of the dignity, the value of man, which is an integral part of any consideration of lifestyle.

I have to ask myself, as a Christian living in the Western world, whether the way I am living tends to diminish, tends to degrade the humanity of a fellow image-bearer of mine anywhere in the world. Specifically, I have to ask myself, am I exploiting in any way by my lifestyle fellow human beings in other parts of the world? We had a frightening program on British television not so long ago about certain clothes which you can buy in the great chain stores in Britain and the States. These clothes, very, very cheap in the Western world, are created in such countries as Korea and Taiwan.

And British television went to Korea and to Taiwan and went behind the scene in these factories and showed you the lifestyle of the factory workers. When you sign up for a job in these factories, you leave your home and you come and live in the factory. And your employer has amazing authority over you.

You sleep there, you eat there, you work there, astonishing hours. And the lifestyle of those workers was incredible. Why were they living like that? So that their owner could make a fat profit and so that we in Marks and Spencers in Carlisle or Littlewoods in Carlisle or you in your chain store in your Western country, so that we could buy clothing cheap.

Now we have to ask ourselves questions about that, don't we? It's not a simple question. We don't have to say, well, if that's the case, I'm not going to buy those clothes any longer. Because you've got another question if you say that, don't you? If you stop buying, what's going to happen to the factories? I mean, at least they're getting something.

They're getting food, they're getting a roof over their heads and so on. So it's not a simple issue. I don't think I've got any simple answers this morning, but I'm raising a question.

We have to ask ourselves. It's the first question of lifestyle. Does how I live degrade my fellow human being in some part of the world? Now there's another principle in creation which is vital to lifestyle, and that's the principle of stewardship.

God made human beings to be responsible for the earth. The command was to fill it, to subdue it, and to rule over it. When he put man in the garden originally, he said to man, you have to work the ground, you have to take care of it, Genesis 2 and verse 15.

We've always got to remember that. We are stewards of God's world, and one day I'm going to have to give an account of my stewardship. What have I done with God's world of which I'm a steward? Am I in any way wasting the resources of God's world? Or am I using them efficiently and carefully and so on? So that's very difficult, isn't it? I was on British Rail not so long ago.

I spent about half my life, I think, on British Rail. And I went to the buffet. It's a very interesting journey to the buffet, you know, about 15 coaches as you try and balance yourself.

And I got a sandwich, a ham sandwich, and a cup of coffee, British Rail coffee, it's an experience. If you ever come to Britain, I warn you about British Rail coffee. And it cost a fortune, number one, one sandwich and a cup of coffee.

And then I went and sat down and ate. And it is incredible what's left when you've eaten. You receive a plate, plastic plate, and a plastic cup, a plastic knife, and I actually got a plastic fork, a plastic spoon, the sandwich was wrapped in a container, and then all of it was given on a little plastic plate.

And just to eat a sandwich and drink a cup of coffee, it's like a bomb has fallen on your table when it's finished, the scrap material that's around. It is amazing how utterly wasteful many of us are in the Western world. That's the second question we have to ask ourselves.

Does the way I live degrade my fellow men? Does the way I live waste the resources of the world which God has made? Then there's a second great principle in the Old Testament. Number one, you've got the principle of creation. Number two, the principle of the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, Exodus 20, 1 to 17.

Remember the first two commandments are warnings against false gods. And I wonder how many people have been seduced in the world by the God of materialism. And their lifestyle is just a blatant breaking of that first commandment.

The way I live shows that I do not love the Lord my God with all my heart, my soul, my mind, and my strength. Now there's also the Sabbath principle, and we don't have time to look at it. Our time's almost half gone.

But the fourth commandment, the Sabbath principle, is also very important to lifestyle. We'll maybe touch on that a little later. Then you've got the tenth commandment, dealing with covetousness.

That of course was the very first sin. What did Adam and Eve do in the Garden of Eden? They were reaching out for a lifestyle that was not God's will for them. That's why they sinned, and that's why sin came into the world.

They were dissatisfied. They were covetous about the lifestyle God had chosen for them. Thirdly, you've got the Sabbath year and the year of jubilee.

Third great Old Testament principle relevant to lifestyle. The Sabbath year, the year of jubilee. Again, we don't have time really, but the 25th chapter of Leviticus is a vital study for all Christians who are concerned about this issue.

Let me try and give you it very, very briefly. Every seventh year was a sabbatical in Israel for the land. For six years they were to sow, they were to reap, but the seventh year the land was to be rested.

And after seven sabbatical years, that's 49 years, every 50th year was the year of jubilee. Now you really need to read the whole chapter to see the importance of that year. But built into the jubilee year regulations is the principle that the land does not belong to us, but it belongs to God.

So you've got in verse 23, the land must not be sold permanently because the land is mine and you are but aliens, you are my tenants. So it takes you back to this principle of stewardship. I might be the owner of a house, actually I am, which is a bit radical in the end, isn't it? I'll tell you about that one day.

I own a house and I have a garden, but according to the Bible I'm just a tenant. Now according to the legal documents I'm the owner, but according to the Bible I'm just a tenant, I'm actually an alien because it's God's land and I've got to use that for his glory and not selfishly. There's some very important economic

principles connected with the year of jubilee and all that I can do is urge you to look at Leviticus chapter 25.

Moving on, the fourth principle is the tithe itself, the Old Testament tithe and the law of gleaning. Now whether there was just one tithe in the Old Testament or whether there was three, I deal with this in this book, which is on lifestyle, *Take My Silver*. But that's not really important to our discussion this morning.

Tithing, whether it was 10% or 30%, clearly implied that everything humanity has belongs to God. That's part of the principle of tithing. Everything I have belongs to God and embedded in the laws of tithing is the compassionate provision that the end of every third year, the tithe for that year was to be laid up for the use of the Levites, the fatherless, the widows, and they were to come and eat of the tithe.

I wonder if you're familiar with the law of gleaning. It's an absolutely beautiful Old Testament law. It was required that the harvest, the fields in Israel were not to be reaped to the very borders.

So if you got your combined harvester out, you didn't go right to the border of the fields. It was the same in the vineyards and in the olive groves as well. They were never stripped totally bare.

Something was always to be left over. The reason was the poor, the sojourner. He could come to the edge of the field and he could take as he had need.

He could go into the olive grove and he could use that which the reaper left. So right into the center of the economy of Israel there is this compassionate requirement for helping the needy. And then the fifth great principle is the Shema as you find it in Deuteronomy 6, verses 4 and 5. We don't need to dwell on it, but those tremendous words, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength. Augustine, I think, has been misquoted when he was supposed to have said, Love God and do what you like. He said something quite like that, but not exactly.

But it's almost true, isn't it? If you love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, then you can do what you like, can't you? Because everything you do is going to be governed by that love. So love for God, as with everything else in the Christian life, is at the very center of any study on lifestyle. And then finally in the Old Testament you've got the general teaching in the Old Testament scriptures about wealth and possessions.

The Old Testament never idolizes poverty. It never condemns wealth or prosperity as being evil. In his covenant dealings with his people, God often rewarded obedience with prosperity.

No doubt about that if you read the Old Testament. He often rewarded his people who were obedient to him with prosperity. But as Ronald Sider points out, the scriptures do not say, as many are saying today sadly, that wealth and prosperity always indicate righteousness.

On the contrary, very much on the contrary, the Old Testament shows over and over again that wealth can be the fruit of oppression. It can be the fruit of exploitation, sins for which God not only destroyed individuals in the Old Testament, but he actually destroyed whole nations. So the Old Testament sets wealth and prosperity in perspective.

It hedges them about with restrictions, with cautions. Wealth is not to be accumulated just for the sake of getting more and more. It must not be gained by oppression and injustice.

It can lead to covetousness. Wealth does not belong to us. It belongs to God, who is the ultimate owner of all that we have.

We are stewards, we're not proprietors of our wealth. And in our use of it, whatever God gives us, we are sinning if we do not reflect God's special concern for the poor, hungry, weak, and oppressed. You might think that's strong, but I think that's what the Old Testament says.

If as you use what God gives to you, you do not have in your mind the weak, the oppressed, the hungry, you are living contrary to the will of God. So, that's six Old Testament principles. Let's turn to the New Testament.

What does the New Testament have to say to us? I think the first thing which must strike us is the picture of Jesus, which emerges out of the Gospels. This is so crucial, isn't it? We're disciples. What's a disciple? If you were to look into a dictionary and find a definition of a disciple, it would be something like this.

A disciple is someone who muddles his life on someone else. I was preaching at a youth camp a couple of years ago, maybe a bit more than that, three or four years ago. I preach there every year.

It's in the English Lake District. And there's always about 500 teenagers there. And on the first night of the camp, you walk onto the stage.

You are the padre. You are to give the messages for the week. They all come for football and things, and they come to exist through the messages.

And so you are the padre. And I looked at these 500 people, and I saw a couple of punks in the congregation. And they looked at me, and I looked at them.

And we had an interesting time. For about three days, we didn't speak to each other. When we walked past each other in the camp, they would spit on the ground when they walked past me.

I didn't quite spit, but I decided that I was going to be hard to begin with. And then I got onto the football field with them, and whoever tackles hardest on the football field, if you want to really be able to speak to teenagers, you've got to play football with them and almost break a few legs before you preach. You see, this is key if you're ever preaching at a camp.

Anyways, after about four days, we finally broke through this great aura, you see. And one of them, I'll never forget, he said to me, he's not dead, you know. He's not dead.

I said, who isn't dead? He said, Sid. Sid who? Am I showing my age? Sid Vicious, of course. I really am showing my age, aren't I? He was the kind of founder, or one of the founders of punk rock, and he died or committed suicide in the States.

Now, why do I tell you this story? I tell you this story because I once met Sid Vicious at a gospel concert at which I was speaking. And I know what Sid Vicious looks like. I know how he acted.

And when this guy said to me, he's not dead, you know, it just clicked in my mind. These two men had studied the life of Sid Vicious. They were only 15 or 16 year olds, but they'd studied his life.

They'd studied the way he dressed. They'd studied the way he spat. And they had modeled their lives on Sid Vicious.

Now, brothers and sisters, that's a disciple. Someone who takes someone else and says, I love that life. I respect that life.

That is the way to live. And I am going to live like that. So it's very, very important to look at the Gospels and to ask yourself, how did Jesus live? I want to walk in his steps.

How did he live? Well, the picture which emerges out of the Gospels is of a person who knew economic poverty throughout his entire life. This is what one Latin American theologian writes. His birth took place without the normal comforts in a feeding trough used for animals.

The offering that Joseph and Mary brought on the occasion of his presentation in the temple was the one that the Old Testament stipulated for poor people, namely two doves or pigeons. Quite early in his life, he was a refugee. He grew up in Galilee, an underdeveloped region of Palestine, in the home of a carpenter.

And this placed him in a position of disadvantage in the eyes of many of his contemporaries. Remember those disparaging words, isn't this the carpenter's son? During his ministry, he had no home which he could call his own. He depended on the generosity of a group of women for the provision of his needs.

That's how Jesus lived. You've got to face the facts. And it's important to understand what this poverty meant at the time.

If you think the doctrine of prosperity is alive and well today, it certainly was alive and well in the days of the New Testament. According to Jewish piety, poverty was definitely regarded as a curse and wealth was praised as one of the great evidences of God's favour. That was the culture in which Jesus was living.

And that's how he chose to live. Now, George Boer uses the word constantly, and I'm hoping, I know that you're all sitting there hoping against hope that I will balance the picture I've just given to you. So let me give you the balance.

It's equally important to see that though Jesus was himself poor, he mixed very, very easily with many rich people. The well-to-do women of Luke chapter 8 and verse 2, for example. Jesus was willing to attend banquets organised by the rich.

Of course, he even incurred the reputation of being a glutton and a drunkard. So quite obviously, Jesus was not a propounder of rigorous asceticism, or he would not have got such a reputation. In his ministry, Jesus made his special concern for the poor and the oppressed very, very plain.

The opening words of the Manifesto of Jesus Christ are found in Luke's Gospel chapter 4 and verse 18. He quotes the prophet Isaiah. The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

Of course, you can say poor in spirit, but that doesn't really deal with it. It's obvious in the way Jesus ministered that though his concern for the poor was not exclusive, he was concerned for all men. Jesus had a special place in his heart for the poor, the oppressed, the blind, and so on.

Then in Luke's Gospel chapter 14 and verse 33, Jesus makes the renunciation of all possessions a straightforward demand for those who want to follow him. Remember the words? So therefore, whoever of

you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. I'm sure you've done the same with that verse as I've done.

You've read it upside down, back to front. You've put it against a mirror to see if you can get it reading differently. If only we could add the words whoever is not willing to renounce all that he has.

Wouldn't it be so much easier? But you know, not one translation I can find, and I've studied it, I'll tell you. Not one translation I can find adds the word willing. They all say the same thing.

Unless we renounce all that we have, we cannot be disciples of Jesus. And in case you're not sure that's what Jesus meant, look how the disciples took this statement. They took it quite literally.

Peter said, lo, look, we've left everything and followed you. How did Jesus send out his disciples? In complete poverty. See it in Matthew 10 and many other scriptures.

On other occasions he told them to sell their possessions, to give alms, and to provide themselves with purses that do not grow old. I think that's a terrific expression. Provide yourself with purses that do not grow old.

Furthermore, Jesus left no one in any doubt about the danger of riches. How hard it will be, Jesus said, for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God. You can see how radical many people in the early centuries considered those words to be.

Because in the later manuscripts they're toned down. The original manuscripts, we don't have the originals of course, but the early manuscripts, they have it that way. The later manuscripts have an addition.

How hard it is for those who trust in riches. That's an addition to the text as far as the critics can see. Jesus actually said how hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Again, remember that Jesus was speaking in a day when riches and piety were considered to go hand in hand. So you can't read the Gospels without coming to the conclusion that Jesus saw riches as a real obstacle. Not an impossible obstacle, I'm not saying that.

But a real obstacle to the germination of the seed of God's word in the human heart. Remember the seed sown among the thorns of the picture of a man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it and make it unfruitful. So let me just sum up the life of Jesus.

He personally lived a life of poverty, though he was not an ascetic in any sense. He was quite free, quite willing to enjoy the company and privileges of the rich. His own needs very often were provided by a group of rich women.

So the way Jesus lived does not say that riches are sin. Riches are an impossibility if you want to enter the kingdom of heaven. In his ministry, Jesus made his special concern for the poor abundantly clear.

He sent out his disciples in complete poverty. He made the renunciation of possessions a condition of following him, clearly stating the great dangers of riches. Finally, let's move to the practice of the early church.

You find that, of course, in the Acts of the Apostles. You see that the early church was made up predominantly of poor people. Paul's words to the Corinthians suggest that only a few members of the

Corinthian church belonged to the upper classes.

Consider your call, brethren. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful.

Not many were of noble birth. But again, beware of extremes because there were many exceptions. You've got the most excellent Theophilus for whom Dr. Luke wrote his two volumes.

You've got the centurion, Cornelius. You've got Manian, who Acts chapter 13 tells us was a member of the court of Herod the Tetrarch. You've got Sergius Paulus, who was the proconsul of the island of Cyprus and trusted Christ.

You've got Dionysius, the Areopagite. You've got a woman named Damaris, Philemon of Colossae, Erastus, who we're told was the city treasurer, Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth. So there are exceptions.

But it's obvious that the large majority of Christians came from humble origin. And this fact was interpreted by Paul as a way God wanted to use to confound the world so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. Jesus Christ is a crucified Messiah.

His church is a body of the weak and the poor who've been renewed by the Spirit of God. In the practice of the early church, the concern for the poor is well known. Luke tells us that all who believed were together and had all things in common.

They sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to everyone as there was need. No one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. Now some people have assumed from that that communal sharing indicates a total rejection of private ownership.

Some people have said on the basis of the early chapters of Luke we should all live in community, none of us should own anything. I shouldn't own a car, I certainly shouldn't own a house, and so on, and so on. The text of the Bible, however, points to a somewhat different situation.

There certainly was a subjective release from the need to possess. Mary, the mother of John Mark, however, kept her house. She used it as a meeting place according to Acts 12 and 12.

Her property was made subservient to the needs of the whole community. It was still hers, but it was available as required by the community of which she was a part. And the sin of Ananias and Sapphira was not that they owned property.

Peter never said that was wrong, the Bible never said that was wrong. Again, the text suggests that they had every right to be in possession of that land, and their sin was that they made a pretension. They pretended hypocritically to give all that they possessed, that in fact they held back.

But their possessing of property was not inconsistent with their Christian commitment. The Acts of the Apostles does not say that at all. So the common ownership of goods was not in any sense compulsory.

It was just one of the results at this time of the outpouring of the Spirit of God on the day of Pentecost. A community of predominantly poor people, slaves. God's Spirit was outpoured, the fruit of the Spirit is love, and the application of that in the day and age in which it happened was community, caring for one another, practically in the ways in which it happened there in the Acts of the Apostles.

From time to time you can see definite steps in the New Testament to organize relief for fellow Christians in need. So when the church in Jerusalem faced economic distress because of the great famine which took place under Claudius in the 40s, the church in Antioch sent relief through the hand of Paul and Barnabas. Later on Paul organized a great collection in the Gentile churches for the purpose, to use his words, of helping the poor saints in Jerusalem.

You can see a very similar emphasis in the apostolic teaching with regard to riches as we noted in the teaching of Jesus. Paul, for instance, includes the greedy amongst those who will not inherit the kingdom. And he describes covetousness as idolatry.

He says, The love of money is the root of all evils. In the same vein, the Revelation of John announces the destruction of a whole civilization dedicated to the consumption of luxuries and indifferent to the gospel of Christ. Read about that in the 18th chapter of Revelation.

However, again the balance. There's another strand of teaching in the Epistles. This allows, please listen to this, this allows for the possibility of combining riches with Christian discipleship.

That possibility, I would submit, is allowed for in the New Testament. And it will be seen in a lifestyle characterized by inner freedom, inner detachment with regard to material possessions and by a constant generosity towards the poor. That is allowed for in the New Testament.

He wrote a marvelous example of that. I recommend to you the biography of John Lang, or John Lang, written by Roy Code. I don't think it's available in our bookshop in the conference, but you can certainly get it through most Christian bookshops.

John Lang was a distant friend of mine. I didn't know him well, but he was born in my home city of Carlisle. And he became the head, of course, of the Lang Corporation, which is a multi, multi, multi-million worldwide conglomerate.

And he was the head of that for, oh, I think, 60, 70 years. His personal income was in the millions. Do you know when he died, do you know how much was in his will? Has anybody read the book? There's an exact figure in the book.

I don't want to quote it because I'll be wrong, but it's certainly no more than a thousand pounds, something like 300 and something. That was his personal bank account. Where was everything else? It was in the John Lang Trust.

And anywhere you go in the world today, almost, if you keep your eyes open, you will see the results of the life of John Lang. You go to New Delhi, you'll find the Delhi Bible Bhavan. What's that built with? Lovely building.

What's it built with? It's built with John Lang money. You go to this country, you go to that country. As I've travelled, I've met things in almost every land I've visited where John Lang money is used.

Probably not confidential, but when Lagos needed a generator, John Lang's Trust responded with a gift. Can you remember what it was, Mike? Was it 3,000? With 3,000 pounds towards a generator. And I have a couple of friends who are on the trust of John Lang and they meet every month just to distribute the income which is coming from the trust of John Lang.

Now, John Lang was a rich man, there's no question. His personal income was great, but there was that absolute detachment personally from the desire to possess. Rich, but detached personally from the desire to possess.

And there was a total generosity towards the poor. Anyone who was in need was ministered to. For me then, one of the most illuminating passages on lifestyle in the whole of the Bible is in Philippians chapter 4 where Paul declares his absolute contentment, whether he has plenty or whether he has need.

This is what he says, I have learned in whatsoever state I am to be content. He says, I know how to be abased and I know how to abound in any and all circumstances. I've learned the secret of facing plenty and facing hunger.

I've learned the secret of facing abundance and want. And I would suggest to you that this contentment stands at the very opposite end of the spectrum to greed. It's the very opposite of greed.

I believe the twentieth century is a greedy world. I want, I will have every man for himself. The opposite to that is contentment.

I have learned in whatever state I find myself to be content. And so Paul writes to Timothy, there's great gain in godliness with contentment. Because we brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world.

That's the theology behind it. We brought nothing into the world, we can't take anything out of the world. So contentment, whatever God gives to us or does not allow us to have, contentment should be our experience.

Some of the poorest people in the world are the most materialistic. You've all heard of the story of the beggar who was sitting in the street and his hands were tightly closed. Along came a rich man and said, Open your hand! The poor man said, No, I'm going to keep what I have.

And he was holding on, let's say, to one farthing. He said, I'm going to keep what I have. And the rich man went on his way and looked back and said, Why didn't you open your hand? I wanted to give you a bar of gold.

Sometimes the poorest can be the most materialistic. Sometimes the rich can be the least materialistic, as we've seen from the example of John Lane. Contentment then is the key.

The attitude of the heart to possessions. And this comes only when we realize that God is sovereign. That's why I read to you from Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 6. We're trusting entirely in his fatherly love, in his provision for us.

If he looks after the birds of the air, why do you look after us? And if we seek first the kingdom, the whole emphasis of the passage is that we can be content about our personal situation in regard to wealth. I'm going to stop there and it leaves us eight minutes for questions. That's an excellent question.

I would like to distinguish between two things. First of all, I believe OM has been called by God to certain distinctives as a fellowship. These are not biblically normative for the whole of the Church, but they are OM distinctives.

For example, the social policy. We do not say that the social policy of OM is a biblical norm and wherever you go for the rest of your life, you must keep the social policy. Do we say that? I don't think so.

Praise the Lord. That's right. I don't think we say that.

We say this is a distinctive which God has given to us as a movement because of the situation we are in. And I would say that certain parts of our lifestyle in OM are not biblically normative. They are distinctives.

So the fact that we came into this room this morning and there's furniture all over the place and this is not, in some senses, a purpose-built conference center. In other senses, this is much better than other places we've had. This is still not a purpose-built conference center.

We're not saying the whole of the Christian Church should live like that. It's never right to have a conference in a conference center and so on. We believe that God has called us to live in a certain way in OM, a certain way, forsaking all, fairly strict, frugal way, in order to release, as much as possibly can be released, to the uttermost parts of the world.

And I would say a biblical norm which we would want to preach in such a church, we wouldn't want to ask the church to live like we do, but a biblical norm which we would want to preach is that covetousness is a sin. Old Testament, New Testament. It is a sin.

And if people are living in this world and their desire is to build up their personal resources with no end in view for the glory of God, then that is sinful living. And we would want to preach against that. So in my home church, where there's quite a few rich people, I do not say we should all live like OM lives.

That's nonsense. But I do preach against covetousness. I do preach forsaking all in the sense that none of us should be bedevilled by this desire to possess and we should be closed, clenched fists like the beggar who wouldn't receive the bar of gold.

Now I don't know whether that answers your question at all, but if we're all convinced about this, we'll be watching. Exactly. So, this is, to me, the most difficult question of all.

I mean, I've been driving around an old Zabunton Ford Tornis, isn't it? You've got it now. For about five years. And it was a good car, you know.

It broke down fairly regularly on the motorway. I missed a few meetings. Helped the faith of those who were waiting for me, but it was a decent car.

And then one day, I went to preach in a little village church and the owner of a chain of garages was there. And he said, from his perspective, this is ridiculous. You are travelling thousands of miles a year.

It's ridiculous to live in a car. Live in a car. That's about right.

It's ridiculous to drive a car around like that. So I said, you know, you're probably right. And what happened? Three days later, he turned up with a car to give me.

Now that has, hasn't it girls, that has raised my apparent lifestyle considerably. It's a much nicer car. So, I had to decide something long before I came into the way.

And I preach on this subject in British churches a lot. And what you've got to decide in the Western world, in my opinion, is your standard of living. You've got to decide the way you are going to live.

And whatever your income might be after that decision, it's going to be affected by that decision. Now, if you want to purchase the book, of course, I don't get any benefits from copyright law, but it's all explained in this chapter. How much should I give? And I use something, in fact, that Ronald Sider uses in one of his books called the graduated tie.

So you decide what is the basis on which you can live. And whatever your income in the future, this might not be relevant for some of us, but whatever your income in the future, you graduate your tie. Now, it's graphs and all the rest of it, so you've got to read it.

I go a bit further than Ronald Sider goes. I would say that you should take as your base level, I should take as my base level in Britain, the minimum wage. I believe that I can live in my home on the minimum wage.

Just. And whatever my income on top of that, I don't give 10% of it or 20% of it or 30% of it, but I've decided what I'm going to give above that base level. And once you've made your decision and you stick to your decision, it deals with a lot of it.

It still doesn't deal with the person who comes with the second-hand telly, although you might not be able to buy a license, which might put you into a moral dilemma. And I hope it does. And it doesn't deal with the car which turns up on your front door.

You've really just got to deal with them individually, I think. You see, my brother-in-law, who's in business and all the rest of it, he wanted my wife to have a, not a spin dryer, but one better than that. What's that? A tumble dryer, that's right.

Now, I mean, I'd love my wife to have a tumble dryer, really. It'd be terrific. But if I have a tumble dryer in my house, you don't even know what it is, do you? I'm not sure either.

But if I have a tumble dryer in my house, that's going to set a standard, isn't it? And I'm a leader in O.M., and people are bound to check the way you live as they come and live with you from time to time. And I've got to think, not just, what would be good for me, what would be nice for me, but I've got to think of what I'm saying by the way I live. So I've had to set my standard.

And whatever I'm offered on top of that, well, I have to individually decide, does that fit within the way I feel it's righteous to live in the Western world, in the light of the world situation. Well, there's enough controversy to help you. Sorry? Yes, we did.

Thank you, Phil. I must make that point. It was not just a personal decision.

I did discuss it with my wife before deciding. I think there's enough controversy to help you enjoy your coffee. Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, we want to be like you. And we know that this is, in many senses, a very small part of it. We want the mind of Christ to be our disposition.

We pray, Lord, that there might be the love, the meekness, the humility, which we read about there in Philippians 2. We pray, Lord, that those things might be part of us. But we are challenged, Lord, by the way you lived. We're challenged by your concern for the poor.

And, Lord, you know the tensions we grapple with. It's very easy to make a statement like this. But, Lord, for me to live it in the coming year in my situation is ten times more difficult.

And we pray that you might grant us grace not to become ascetics and peculiar because, Lord, we know that poverty can lead to sin. But, Lord, we pray that you might grant us that balance in our culture, wherever you might place us, to live out your life, to live out your standards. Grant it to us in OM, Lord.

We see many changes around us. And we want to change because you're a God who moves on. But, Lord, we only want to change according to your will.

Grant us to know your will in some of these very practical areas, personally and as a movement in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/29/SID29286.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/peter-maiden/money-lifestyle-2881984/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net