

Lent 2012 Consumer Detox

This coming Lent, take a journey with others towards less stuff and more life.

What is the Detox?

Seven weeks during Lent 2012 to detox from consumerism. Any church or small group can get involved using the notes below. During Lent you can also follow a daily blog, hear online talks and join others reading *Consumer Detox* by Mark Powley.

Daily blog: www.consumerdetox.wordpress.com

Online talks: www.stgeorgesleeds.org.uk (28th Feb & 6th, 13th, 20th & 27th March)

Sample chapters of *Consumer Detox*: available on the [Zondervan website](#)

Weekly Group Notes

Week 1 (21st-25th Feb)

Intro

INTRODUCTION: Read the Detox Challenge:

This week Lent begins – 40 days, plus Sundays, to draw near to God. 40 days to let God expose destructive patterns in our lives and breathe freedom in their place. The Lent Consumer Detox is an invitation to less stuff and more life. As we remember Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11) we can go on our own journey of greater freedom from the temptations and trappings of our consumer culture.

Each week this group will be asked to do something practical: to make something, find something out, try something, give something, and so on. Trust will be needed. And a willingness to take risks. If we are willing to go on the journey, God can do amazing things through us, this Lent and beyond.

MAIN ACTIVITY: Cook pancakes, or share a meal together

DISCUSS AND PRAY: Fat Tuesday

Pass round a block of Fat/Butter. The day before Lent is sometimes called Fat Tuesday. Traditionally, it's a final day for rich indulgence before the fast begins. What about you? Where is the 'fat' in your life? 'Fatty' things may not be bad in themselves, but from time to time we can benefit from giving them a break. Share ideas and then pray for each other.

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE: Give something up for Lent

You can also follow the daily detox blog each day of Lent (www.consumerdetox.wordpress.com) or read Chapter 1 of *Consumer Detox*

Week 2 (26th Feb-3rd Mar)

Thorns - *How can we prevent our stuff from choking our faith?*

INTRODUCTION: Read the Detox Challenge (if it wasn't read last week) OR share brief stories of giving things up for Lent

MAIN ACTIVITY: Make a life inventory

Make a list of all the things you own. Houses, furniture, possessions, assets (and debts), savings, insurance – the whole lot! Depending on the wealth of your group, this may take some time. Be honest. No one else should see what is on your paper without your permission.

DISCUSS AND PRAY: Weeds

Read Mark 4:1-20, then re-read verses 18 & 19 several times.

What do you think Jesus means? How can these things choke faith?

Give each person some weeds/thorns to hold in their hand. Spend some time praying about what you've read and said.

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE: Swap inventories (the lists, not the things themselves!)

Would you let someone else see your inventory?

Swap your inventory with someone in the group. Each person who receives someone else's inventory needs to make some time to pray over it. PRAISE God for his generosity. THANK him for specific things he has given. PRAY that the owner of these things will have wisdom and a generous heart.

Finally, write a few notes on the inventory. How did this list inspire you to thank and praise God? Did any words of encouragement or wisdom come to mind? How about ideas to live more sustainably, to share more, or any other challenges? Remember to always speak in love – besides, someone else may be praying over *your* inventory!

You can also follow the daily detox blog each day of Lent (www.consumerdetox.wordpress.com) or read Chapter 2 & 3 of Consumer Detox

Week 3 (4th – 10th Mar)

Rich - How to be (truly) rich

INTRODUCTION: Return life inventories that were shared last week (you'll need them for Week 6)

MAIN ACTIVITY: Global Rich List

Set up access to www.globalrichlist.com. Work out and discuss your scores. Read this quote from Consumer Detox (p. 62-63):

Whenever I doubt the power of thankfulness, I remind myself of this reflection from the writer Rhidian Brook, after he had spent a month living in rural Kenya:

...living in a community with a high prevalence of HIV/Aids, a water shortage, no electricity, unreliable food and exceptionally bad roads, has seriously challenged our understanding about the world. We can't help feeling that if we'd done this earlier we might have learned things that years of pursuing culture and pleasure have failed to teach us.

...you realise that your horizons have been utterly limited until now, and that these people you characterised as poor and sick and somehow lacking in the basics are, despite all they face, talented, funny and generous; that they live with exceptional hope and resilience, and in communities so inter-dependent that it makes our individualistic, self-sufficient lives seem deleterious. For a while, your whole system for measuring "wealth" gets turned upside down.

...And you sit down exhausted from the rollercoaster of an African day, when your 70 year old neighbour comes to check that you are okay (as if you are the one who is deprived) and you offer her a glass of water and she pauses before drinking and you wonder if you've broken some social protocol and then you see that she is actually thanking God for the glass of the water and for the gift of life, and you realise that all your wealth, travel, education and privilege has never really taught you the true worth of a glass of water or been able to demonstrate how precious life is as simply and powerfully as this.

(Rhidian Brook, BBC Radio 4 Thought for the Day, 2nd Feb 2006.)

DISCUSS AND PRAY: Read 1 Timothy 6:6-10 & 17-19

Are we 'those who are rich' (1 Tim 6:17)?

Why don't we feel rich?

According to Paul, what are true riches?

Close with prayers of thanks – LOTS of them, if you can!

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE: Say thanks

Pray ONLY prayers of thanks all week to God. Each time you pray, for a chunk of time every morning, and so on – only thank God. You could make a journal of your prayers and/or what they are teaching you.

You can also follow the daily blog or read Chapters 4 and 5 of the book

Week 4 (11th-17th Mar)

Stop - *Breaking free from the always-on culture*

INTRODUCTION: Share feedback from the week of thanks. Spend some time praying in stillness somehow.

MAIN ACTIVITY: Map out your time

ON a sheet of paper, find a way to visualise your average week (or month / term if this is easier). Where does work fit? Where do you get opportunities to be creative? Where does rest fit? Share the results in 2-3s and discuss.

DISCUSS AND PRAY: Read Genesis 2:2-3

What does this passage teach about work and rest?

How holy is rest to you?

Read this excerpt from Consumer Detox (p. 109-112):

We live in the world of always-on. TV is available through the night. We can go online round the clock. We can shop pretty much any day we choose. We can eat fruit in or out of season. Nothing is allowed to stop us. We can work and shop and choose anytime, all the time. Non-stop. But 24/7 life is exhausting. The consumer carousel never stops. The maximised life is crammed full. At home and at work, the constant pace takes its toll.

In Hebrew the word Sabbath means stop. This is the divine rhythm: create and rest. Six days on the go, one day to stop.

Sabbath...is a sign of *strength*. Sometimes it takes more power to stop than to start (think of a forest fire). Sabbath requires composure. It requires the strength of will to interrupt the natural momentum of work. Enough. Now I rest. Sabbath is a sign of *joy*. There's a kind of blessed delight in the way God rests. He stands back to celebrate the richness of his creation. And he invites us to do the same. Sabbath is a sign of *contentment*. God stops. But was everything really finished? The world still needed filling and subduing. No matter, he delegated that. Maybe God is more willing to trust others than we are?

When it says "God blessed the seventh day and made it holy", part of what it means is that he planted this pattern in the very heart of the universe. So anyone searching for life and goodness (in other words, anyone wanting to be blessed) needs to take hold of the create/rest rhythm.

Why do we find it so hard to set limits to consumption / to stop work?

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE: Plan time to create and time to rest

What can you do this week that is creative (perhaps you can share the results with your group)? Plan some time to be creative. Plan some time to rest. That is, to call production/consumption to a halt, to be still (at least, stiller than normal!) and enjoy being with God in his world.

You can also follow the daily blog or read Chapter 6 & 7 of the book

Week 5 (18th – 24th Mar)

Idol - God vs Mammon

INTRODUCTION: Sing or listen to a worship song OR join together in the day's Common Prayer (see commonprayer.net)

MAIN ACTIVITY: Study Luke 16:1-12

Print this passage out (on large sheets, if you can, with plenty of space to write on).

Read the story carefully. Find as many parallels as you can between the shrewd manager and followers of Jesus. Discuss your findings and consider Jesus' words in verses 9-12.

DISCUSS AND PRAY: Mammon

Read Luke 16:13. 'You cannot serve both God and Mammon'. Jesus here uses an Aramaic term 'Mammon' which portrays money as an idol, a rival for our devotion to the one true God.

Why can't we love God and money?

What are the marks of someone who serves God and doesn't serve money?

Pray for each person in the group. Pray for freedom from fear and the courage to use money for kingdom purposes. You could speak this blessing over each person as you pray:

Sunrise breaks through the darkness for good people—
God's grace and mercy and justice!
The good person is generous and lends lavishly;
No shuffling or stumbling around for this one,
But a sterling and solid and lasting reputation.
Unfazed by rumour and gossip,
Heart ready, trusting in God,
Spirit firm, unperturbed,
Ever blessed, relaxed among enemies,
They lavish gifts on the poor—
A generosity that goes on, and on, and on.
An honoured life! A beautiful life!

(From Psalm 112, The Message)

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE: Pray before you buy

This week (and for future weeks, too, if you can) when something breaks, or you're planning a new purchase, wait. Don't buy just yet (except for food / essential medical supplies, etc); pray and ask God to provide. Two weeks is a good time window. Ask God to show you if you really need the new thing. If so, ask him to bring it to you some other way. God has provided some incredible things through this approach! If, after two weeks, you're still sure you need it and God hasn't brought it to you another way, go ahead, buy it and enjoy it with thanks.

You can also follow the daily blog or read Chapters 8 & 10 of the book

Week 6 (25th – 31st Mar)

The Cross - *God's generosity and our surprising response*

INTRODUCTION: arrange to listen quietly to some readings from Luke's Gospel:

Luke 9:21-22 // 9:43-45 // 9:51 // 9:57-58 // 18:31-34 // 22:19-20 // 22:63-65 // 23:26 // 23:33-34 // 23:44-46 // 24:13-15 & 24:25-27

Spend some time thanking God for his sacrificial generosity

MAIN ACTIVITY: Plan a group gift

Plan a way you can celebrate Easter as a group by giving something *together*. Be as creative as you can with your time, gifts, possessions and finances. What can you give? Who will you give to? When and how?

This gift can be a response to God's great Easter gift, a celebration of the gift of giving, and a sign of the freedom we have to be generous together in Jesus' name.

DISCUSS AND PRAY: Read Luke 14:25-33

What has it cost you so far to follow Jesus?

Have you considered the full cost?

If God is so generous, why does he ask us to surrender everything?

Pray for God's wisdom and help in giving the group gift, and in following the call of discipleship.

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE: Return to your inventory

If you haven't made one already, make an inventory of all you own (see Week 2). Look over this list and pray (you could do this with your spouse if you're married). Consider the comments from anyone who's seen your list. Thank God for his generosity. Offer God's gifts back to him and listen / consider carefully what to do next...

You can also follow the daily blog or read Chapters 9 & 11 of the book

Week 7: (1st- 8th Apr)

Passover and reflection

MAIN ACTIVITY: Share a Passover Meal

Online Passover guides can be found at <http://www.shalom-peace.com/Haggadah.html> or <http://www.crivoice.org/haggadah.html>, for example.

DISCUSS AND PRAY: Share stories of liberation

How has God been helping you live more freely?

Read out any bits of the Bible / blog / book you have found particularly helpful

In what ways are you still hoping to be set free?

You could read the following (*Consumer Detox*, p. 225-228):

In every generation God calls his people to be the epicentre of a grace earthquake: restoring lives, reversing fortunes, living out the free economics of the kingdom. We have a lot to learn. But we know one thing already: we cannot make this journey alone. Mike Riddell is right:

In tackling materialism, there is no way in which this can be addressed by individuals. Resistance requires the power and support of a group, who are putting themselves on the line in solidarity. Only in a group can we begin to hear and respond to the searching words of Jesus on possessions and how they affect us.

Community is key. And community is the setting for the symbol of the vision: Bread broken. Wine poured. Do this in remembrance of me. This simple meal changes us. If we let God go to work.

Why? Because it is rooted in a real event. Jesus of Nazareth really died on a cross with forgiveness on his lips. Because sharing bread and wine is a lifestyle. It pulls us out of non-committal spectating and conscripts us to the kingdom cause. And because this love feast cuts to the heart of our selfishness with a gift of pure grace.

Václav Havel once said, "You cannot live outside a culture. But you can create within it zones and spaces where you can become who you really are." That's what we're doing now. Story by story. Prayer by prayer. Step by step. We are becoming who we really are.

And as we persevere, a kingdom hope grows. We can transform consumerism. We can resist its pressures on our community life. We can make money flow in new directions and build a more sustainable economy. We can live differently. This hope is unstoppable. The conspiracy of freedom cannot be silenced. God's future is coming. And so perseverance is always, always worthwhile. As Havel writes:

This [resistance] went on for years, not without difficulties, but for years. Over time the truth became stronger and stronger, and at a certain point people began to walk in the streets and say to the system, "We don't believe you anymore." And the system fell.

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE: What next?

The Breathe website (breathenetwork.org) provides further resources and links

You can also follow the daily blog or read Chapters 12 of the book

The Book

Consumer Detox: Less Stuff, More Life (Zondervan, 2010)

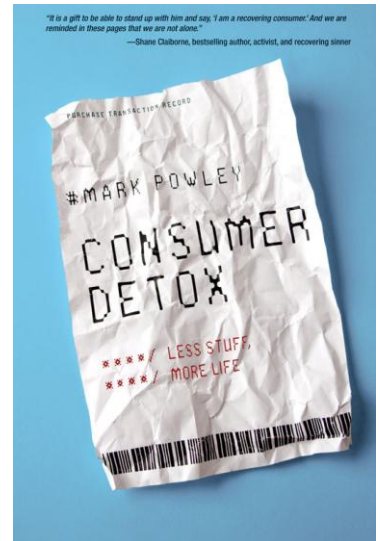
Available from Christian bookstores, Amazon, and in Kindle and audio formats.

This book is not about guilt. It's about life. It is a gift to be able to stand up and say with Powley, "I am a recovering consumer." (Shane Claiborne)

Mark Powley tackles one of the most important challenges facing Christian discipleship in the west today. This book is readable, clever, funny, and is full of simple, practical but radical wisdom. If the church took this agenda seriously, it could make a big difference. (Graham Tomlin)

Mark Powley has written a book that takes addictive consumerism seriously, yet manages to be vibrant, funny and thoroughly engaging at the same time... an unstoppable, can't-put-down read. (Green Christian)

Despite its anti-consumeristic drive, this first-time writing beats with joy, fun, depth, challenge and a wonderful lightness of spirit. Powley's writing, in the power of the Holy Spirit, evokes a rare and deep repentance toward a renewed life of obedience to Christ. (J. Douglas – Amazon review)



The Breathe network

Breathe is a Christian network for simpler living. We send out free monthly updates to encourage simpler, more generous, more sustainable living. Check out the website (www.breathenetwork.org) or email in@breathenetwork.org to subscribe.