

# Breathe

*Less stuff, more life*

INSIDE...

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[www.ibreathe.org.uk](http://www.ibreathe.org.uk)



Consumer  
DETOX:  
Part Four



Life  
Without  
New Shoes

## Hardly Different?

### Calling the bluff of High Definition TV

So, High Definition TV (HD) is arriving. Apparently it promises picture quality up to 4 times clearer than conventional TV. I'm not one to quibble about statistics (OK, not much) but I sat in front of a new TV flicking between HD and old-style analogue, and I'm not sure I'd describe it as even twice as clear.

But this isn't about clarity, it's about *intensity*. According to the Pioneer HD Guide, 'Life is more intense in HD'. Is it? Is life really more intense if you spend it slumped on a sofa? Isn't there actually the opposite danger – that stuck in front of mesmerizing screens we don't actually get out and do the truly intense things of life? The guide continues, 'Imagine being able to see every blade of grass on the football pitch as your team hits the winning goal'. This is beyond ridicule. Why would you want to see every blade of grass on a football pitch? Besides, if you're looking at the grass, you'll miss the goal! (Could this be a metaphor for High Definition TV?)

#### The Bluff

We should be clear about this: TV is not evil. It can bring inspired moments of wonder, friendship, humour and truth. But this offer of intensity is something else. It's been called

### What is *Breathe*?

- A space to think about how we handle money, time and possessions in a Christian way
- Non-judgemental, realistic and simple to be part of
- We want to  
APPRECIATE life more fully  
REFUSE the consumer dream  
CONNECT with others  
CHOOSE a more generous lifestyle

*Breathe* is a Christian network for simpler living. It represents orthodox Christians of all kinds and is overseen by Friends: Phil Whittall, Chris Ducker, Chris Webster and Rev. Mark Powley.



*Is life really more intense if you spend it slumped on a sofa?*

'the technological bluff'. It's the well-worn deceit that something must be better because it's new. Whatever we currently have begins to feel jaded and out of date. 'Upgrading' seems inevitable.

Before long, the old technology isn't even in the shops anymore and so we have no choice. But did the promise of a better life really come good? As Tom Wiggins of gadget magazine *Stuff* recently admitted, 'It's about desire, these aren't things we need at all – but we all fall for it'.

#### Anticipation

Jesus, it turns out, was a great fan of anticipation. He told us to get ready for something. He called for a life of eager anticipation of the kingdom of God. In a subtle way, the promise of HD TV (or whatever else we're offered) gets in the way of this. In our consumer culture, there's always something new coming: the latest Barclays Premier League, this winter's colours, the new season of 24 or the next prize-winning novel. We're forever waiting, forever tantalized. And in the meantime what happens is this: that bit of our soul that was made to hunger and thirst for God, to long for his appearing with all that we are, grows smaller. We have less desire left for God and his kingdom and his stuff. We have stuff of our own – and maybe a bit less time to spare, too.

The question is not what TV you have, if you have one at all. The question is certainly not how many blades of grass you can see on a football pitch. The question is this: What do you look forward to? What makes your heart tingle? Jesus is jealous to be the longing of our hearts. He desires to be our desire. He wants to take first place in our lives. In fact, he died for the privilege. How intense is that?

Mark Powley is a friend of *Breathe*

# Consumer DETOX

## Part Four:

# Choose

### Steps to a more generous lifestyle

We've come to the final part of the Detox. When we can *appreciate* all God's wonderful gifts to us, *refuse* the illusions of consumerism and *connect* with others along the way, we're free for the greatest challenge and opportunity of all – to *choose* a more generous lifestyle.



## 1 TAKE CONTROL

You'll never really escape the control of money if you're trapped under mounting debt or simply have no idea where it all goes. To take control we need to face the true state of our finances. You may find this a revealing exercise - our spending reflects the priorities of our heart. You'll probably find it empowering, too. Finding ways to budget can help you grab your money by the scruff of the neck and make it serve God and his kingdom!

### BUDGET

*Find a way to budget:*

Keep a note of what you spend for a month – what does it say about your priorities?

Plan a budget for the year – where does generous giving fit?

Don't struggle with debt alone. Call Credit Action (0800 138 1111)

## 2 GIVE SACRIFICIALLY

Christian love is not a matter of theoretical platitudes, half-measures, or polite charity. If God had loved us that way, we'd still be utterly lost. Christian love is practical, wholehearted and sacrificial. 'As I have loved you, so you must love one another' (John 13:34).

This may mean committing to give away a tenth of your income. But it may mean more. God's people are called to give radically (Luke 12:33), sacrificially (Mark 12:41-44) and joyfully (2 Corinthians 9:6-8).

### PHONE A MINISTER

Why not contact a Christian leader you respect and ask them what *they* think is a good guide for generous giving? Then pray and consider their advice. If it seems good to you...call the bank!

## 3 DETHRONE MONEY

One of the more subtle ways that money rules us is to make us reduce everything to the 'bottom line'. We say things like 'time is money' (is it?), or 'that would be a waste of money' (is that *always* bad?). But who made money the measure of all things? Certainly not Jesus.

When we let money rule our thinking (even our thinking about giving) it still remains an idol in our lives. It's better to be outrageously generous at times and embarrassingly frugal at others than to measure every decision by money.

### LEAVE THE SCRIPT

Find ways to show that money isn't God. Practice some acts of spontaneous generosity. Don't always demand financial equality. Refuse the odd special offer. And so on...

## 4 WHOSE MONEY?

Everything we have isn't really ours; it's God's (1 Chronicles 29:11). In fact, God will one day call us to account for our use of his money.

We need to ask: How do our finances serve God's purposes? How do we make our money? Where is it invested? What shops do we spend it in and how do they treat their suppliers? How much of it do we invest in mission, justice and the other passions of God's heart? As Jesus said, 'if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?'

### WRITE A VISION

Write a vision for your handling of God's money. How do you believe God would like you to use it?

Then consider how to use any power you have as a worker, consumer, investor and giver to fulfill that vision.

## 5 GO ON A JOURNEY

If the Consumer Detox is about ticking boxes so that we feel better about ourselves, it's a waste of time. No one ever *arrives* at 'The Simple Life' and receives a congratulatory certificate from heaven! We're all on a journey. No one is hopelessly behind; no one has arrived. No one has all the answers; no one rule works for everyone. The key question is simply this: what direction are you moving in?

### TAKE THE NEXT STEP

*Whatever* it is for you...

# No New Shoes?

What made **Anna Drew** give up shopping, and what does she now wear on her feet? Annie Porthouse found out.

**'No new shoes' is the title of your blog. No new shoes? What, not ever? Doesn't it hurt to walk around bare foot all the time?!**

Happily, I have many pairs of old shoes, so my feet have survived, no problem. To be honest, my feet would probably be fine if I never bought another pair again, but there's always the tempting call of shiny new shoes in the background. We chose the name 'No new shoes' because, for us, new shoes symbolised something we often don't really need but might buy out of pure indulgence. How many people reading this have more pairs of shoes than they really need? I know I do.

**So how did it all start – what motivated you to start this blog?**

During Lent 2006, a colleague and I became aware of a group of women in the USA who were giving up shopping for a whole year, and we thought it might be an interesting experiment. We read *'Not Buying It'*, a book by an American journalist, Judith Levine, who also gave up shopping for a year. She had some interesting insights about how we build up an identity for ourselves through consumerism: I am what I eat, wear, watch, buy, etc.

The average UK household spends £443 a week, with £58 on recreation/culture and £62 a week on transport. We wanted to find out what would happen if we just said 'No!' to all this spending and settled on buying only what we need. We thought we'd give it a go for Lent – a time to take stock and think about the things we rely on, and what counts as essential. So we set up the blog to chart our progress, and a few more people



*Anna with a fellow revolutionary, but how did they manage?*

decided to join in and contribute. It took all my will power to last through Lent. It was simple things that became problems, like going out for a meal with my husband or going out with friends. I became a bit of a hermit!

**How can we define what we just 'want' and what we really 'need' when it comes to shopping?**

I think that's biggest challenge of all. There was much debate on the blog about what counts as 'essential'. For example, could I spend the money to go out for a friend's birthday dinner? In that instance, I decided yes – to be able to celebrate with him was really important to me, but maybe I was just cheating! Whether or not we really need something, we'll always find a way to justify it if we want it that much. As my little friend Luca often says, 'but I NEED it, mummy!'

**What are your top tips for avoiding consumerism in today's world?**

Well, I'm not sure you can completely avoid it – we're all consumers of some sort or another. It's impossible for us to survive in complete isolation. We need

each other and the world's resources to get by, but there are things we can do to lessen the pressure that our demands place on the environment by shopping ethically and thinking carefully about what we really need, and why we want certain things.

***“How many people reading this have more pairs of shoes than they really need?  
I know I do.”***

**Where does God fit into your decision to live this way?**

A Christians, I think we have a duty to care for the world and each other, and I suppose the *no new shoes* thing was a way of recognising that and thinking about ways in which we can live out that commitment (as well as being realistic about the challenges of that kind of lifestyle). It makes you much more grateful for the things you have and more appreciative of the little things in life. It also gave me a chance to think carefully about where my priorities lie – how much time do I spend in the shops and how much time in prayer, for example.

## Get Connected

Breathe is now 2 years old! We've learnt so much over this time, and we're incredibly excited about where things can go from here. If you'd like to be kept in touch, let us know your details. We send out updates like this several times a year, by email or by post. To join our electronic mailing list, send a blank email to [in@ibreathe.org.uk](mailto:in@ibreathe.org.uk). Or contact us on [breathe@ibreathe.org.uk](mailto:breathe@ibreathe.org.uk) or c/o 30 Rannoch Road, Hammersmith W6 9SR.

Visit [Anna's blog at www.nonewshoes.blogspot.co.uk](http://Anna's blog at www.nonewshoes.blogspot.co.uk)  
Read more from Annie Porthouse at [www.annieporthouse.com](http://www.annieporthouse.com)



**10 billion** the number of plastic bags Britons use each year. Only 1 in 200 is recycled

**400 years** the time it could take some plastic bags to decompose

**12 minutes** the average time a plastic bag is used for

**One million** the number of seabirds thought to be killed each year by ingesting bags or caught in plastic debris. After the birds die and decompose, the plastic remains and can kill again.

**Modbury, Devon** the first town in Britain to go plastic-bag free. All of the town's 43 shops are currently using only reusable or degradable bags.

More info: [www.plasticbagfree.com](http://www.plasticbagfree.com); [www.slate.com/id/2169287/fr/flyout](http://www.slate.com/id/2169287/fr/flyout)



## Other News...

1) On March 8th 2008 we are planning the **first ever Breathe Day Conference!** Make a note in the diary and watch this space...

2) Barclaycard have launched a new 'ethical' credit card. What have they called it? Breathe. Thanks for the compliment, guys. We must run features on you more often (see Breathe Six).

3) A Rocha, the Christian conservation group, has launched 'Living Lightly' an invitation for individuals to commit to a simple, greener lifestyle. More details at [www.livinglightly24-1.org.uk](http://www.livinglightly24-1.org.uk).

4) August 1<sup>st</sup> saw national Play Day aimed at reclaiming areas for children's play. 70% of adults say they used to play outside every day, compared with only 20% of children now.

## *I thought it was supposed to be simple*

Just recently I was offered the opportunity to buy a car that was newer and had less mileage than our current old one. It was a good deal. The only thing is the car we have now works just fine. So should I upgrade even when I don't need to just because it seems like too good a deal to pass up. Was this God's providence or a test of my non-consumer willpower?



Making the decision was agonising for me. Life would be a lot easier if I wasn't concerned about consumerism or debt or the environment. But then I thought that's part of the point isn't it? We're not used to thinking about the 'should I have it?' question, and given the easy availability of credit we don't think about the 'can I afford it?' question either. So going through those processes and weighing it all up is part of a better decision making process, part of not just doing something 'because I want to'.

On the flip-side I don't want to become an eco-Pharisee who takes all pleasure out of life. I had to be sure that driving an old car wouldn't be some kind of weird badge of honour.

What did I decide? In the end I stuck with what we had for the following reasons:

- We weren't thinking about buying a new car - the pressure to buy came from outside us not from within. We were content and then the thought of having a new car actually made us less content with how things were.
- The old car is actually fine and we don't need to replace it.
- It felt like a pressure, and there wasn't peace about spending money on something we might need someday but not yet

*How do you decide when it's time for a new car?*

The thinking process may not have been that simple, but in the end the solution wasn't actually that complicated at all.

Catch more reflections from Phil Whittall on [www.thesimplepastor.blogspot.com](http://www.thesimplepastor.blogspot.com)

Remember this:  
Whoever sows sparingly  
will also reap sparingly,  
And whoever sows generously  
will also reap generously.

2 Corinthians 9:6 (TNIV)