

Breathe

Less stuff, more life

INSIDE...



Consumers
Anonymous



No Car,
no life?

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Make Luxury History?

Can we really make poverty history without a change of lifestyle?

"Elton John is going to save a couple of countries... by giving up his monthly flower budget". That's how the joke ran on an episode of Have I Got News For You recently.

It's a point that's been made on radio phone-ins and TV debates up and down the country. How can celebrities on the rich list get high and mighty about the millions living on \$1 a day? If they really cared, shouldn't they be giving more away?

Perhaps they should. But on this view the only celebrities who could really campaign would be penniless ones, and there aren't many of them. If only Mother Theresa had been a bit handy on the guitar...

Besides, all this talk of hypocrisy hides a much deeper question about how each one of us lives. We're running out of water because we leave the taps running as we clean our teeth, blithely sending the world's most precious resource quite literally down the drain. We're polluting the very air we breathe by the cars we drive. The poor



Elton John: too rich to support Make Poverty History?

*We need to
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around the world are kept poor by our desire for endless growth, cheap goods, and Tesco's Value range rather than fair trade.

As a wise man once said, "Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality." But equality isn't likely unless we change the way we live. We need to consider a thoughtful lifestyle that takes into account the poor and the environment, one perhaps that is content to live on less.

We won't get there by casting stones at celebrities (besides, which of us could throw the first one?). But the idea behind Breathe is to start asking how we could make it happen, in different ways for different people. No stones, just space to think.

The Apostle Paul, again: "For we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that." Content with that? Maybe Paul was onto something. And maybe having less stuff, for the sake of the kingdom of God, could somehow give us more life after all.

As we seek to Make Poverty History, can we also make some of our luxuries history too? Are we willing to make a change? And not just the rock stars among us either.

Phil Whittall is a writer and church leader based in Shrewsbury



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 (no one-commune-fits-all solutions)
- We want to
APPRECIATE life more fully
REFUSE the consumer dream
CONNECT with others, and
CHOOSE a more generous lifestyle

Consumers Anonymous

(Are we addicted to possessions?)

Mark Powley, a recovering sufferer, considers 4 steps to freedom and shares some of the passion behind Breathe.

*Do you go shopping when you're unhappy?
Do you always have a balance on your credit card?
Do you need extra storage to hold all of your stuff?*

If you answered yes to all these questions, you may be a shopaholic. On the other hand, you could just be a normal consumer living in the western world.

That's certainly my story. I'm no shop-loving consumerist freak. I don't camp outside department stores before the sales, fight over bargain sofas or get the shakes if I can't have a McDonald's meal. But I have suspected for some time that consumerism, that long, seductive process from advertising to shopping to buying and using, has too much of a grip on my life.

The tell tale signs are there: an evening feels dull without the telly on

The tell-tale signs are there: I get very excited just before a purchase. I feel dowdy and cheap if my clothes look old or faded. An evening feels dull without the telly on.

Does that make me addicted to possessions? I'm not sure. There's nothing essentially evil about material goods. But why do I need so many? It's certainly true that the world couldn't possibly give all its 6 billion inhabitants my kind of lifestyle. There just isn't enough chocolate, for starters.

Of course, if you really want to know whether you're addicted to something or not, just try giving it up. Giving up TV for Lent one year, and non-food shopping the next, has certainly opened my eyes. I've come to see how much of my life I live through a screen (a computer screen, TV screen, a car windscreen). And I've come to see how much my moods depend on the things I buy and own.

So, if there are 12 steps for people trapped by alcoholism, what if we can't handle our money? Where's the clinic? More to the point, as I asked myself earlier this year, where's the UK Christian group dedicated to promoting a simpler lifestyle?

I couldn't find one. So I got together with a few friends and we decided to see what we could do. This is how Breathe was born,



An American Family with all of their stuff, photographed outside their house by Peter Menzel. But what would our photo look like?

and the four steps below were our starting point. But who knows where it will end...

Step One: Appreciate

No meal is like the first meal after a fast. There's something about going without that teaches us to appreciate God's blessings. Likewise, if we surround ourselves with possessions and fill our lives with business, we'll have no space to see what's truly important. Too much stuff, even good stuff, can actually choke our faith.

Appreciation begins with the gifts that money can't buy: a walk through the park, quietly listening to a friend, soaking in the peace of God. But appreciative people know how to party, too. They can savour a good wine or enjoy the finer things in life. The only difference is, they enjoy them all the more, because they don't treat such things as a right or a possession but as gifts from God.

Step Two: Refuse

Breathe isn't the only recent UK magazine launch. Its competitor is the attractively named, Happy – the one-stop shopping magazine. Our strapline: 'less stuff, more life'; their strapline: 'who says you can't buy happiness?'

We can't both be right. Or as Jesus said, 'you cannot serve both God and money'.

Refusing is about recognizing the pervading values of our culture. It's about exposing the consumer dream, with all its glossy images, fake promises and suffocating over-abundance. Somehow, if we can put our finger on exactly what's happening, maybe it won't control us anymore.

Step Three: Connect

What difference does a 4-page bulletin make to anything? Good question. All I know is that the one thing that holds me back the most from living more simply is that I don't know who else is trying to do it.

This is how it often is: we feel isolated, we feel paralysed, we feel our puny efforts will never get us anywhere. But what if we could share ideas and inspire each other? This is where Breathe comes in. And you, if you're willing.

Step Four: Choose

Lastly, it comes down to each of us to choose to live differently. But Breathe was never intended as a smug club for people who've arrived at The Good Life. Life is more complicated than that.

So what's the solution? The solution is: there is no solution. Not the same one for everyone, anyway. Breathe aims to give you space to make your own choices; to inspire, but not to judge. It's for people on the journey, people interested in change but not sure what I should look like.

As for me, I choose to try and shake myself out of the dream, to break the isolation and end the paralysis, to push a door and walk out into a wider world. With God's help, I choose to breathe.



Mark Powley works as a curate in Croydon



Blessed are the cyclists?

Pippa Goldring (above), her husband John, and their two teenagers live in Croydon. Outside their house is a drive, but no car. Instead, they own a fleet of bikes (3 bikes, one trailer and a tandem) and use public transport. What are they thinking of?

Have you ever had a car?

For my 21st birthday, my mother bought me a little white mini. I loved driving it, and the sense of independence that came with it. But when I moved to London it was often vandalised and I ended up selling it.

Why did you first choose not to have a car?

My husband, John, had never driven, mainly for environmental reasons. So when a health issue kept me from driving for a time, we decided to get by without a car.

So what's good about a car-less life?

Life is simpler without a car, and you also think more locally. As a mum, I'm not a taxi driver, which on the whole is a plus. Yes, I do sometimes have to rely on the parents

of my children's friends! But in general, our children have taken to public transport naturally, and they became independent quite quickly. In fact, the transport system is one reason we chose to live in Croydon.

*Blessed are the cyclists,
For they shall have strong legs.
Blessed are those who pedal,
For they shall miss traffic jams.
Blessed are you when people beep
at you, and cut you up and splash
you on rainy days,
Rejoice on that day and ring your
bell for joy...*

I don't know how many miles we cycle a week, maybe 15-20 each. And I don't know how much money we save. But I'm sure we do save, and that it keeps us healthy. You don't have to go to the gym – you can keep fit just by your lifestyle.

How do people react?

Surprise, I think, is the main reaction. But people can also be quite defensive, justifying their choice to drive, even though we don't ask them to!

Is it always an easy ride?

No. Medium length journeys require much more planning. There are nice places, just too far away, that we've never visited. I think there's such a thing as road rage on a bike, too. Sometimes I wish I had a car. But on balance, I'm sure the benefits outweigh the costs. With cycling I find a great freedom. There's a sense of achievement, just for getting from A to B!

Oxygen

I wanna be better than oxygen
So you can breathe when you're drowning and
weak in the knees
I wanna speak louder than Ritalin
For all the children who think that they've got a
disease
I wanna be cooler than t.v.
For all the kids that are wondering what they
are going to be
We can be stronger than bombs
If you're singing along and you know that you
really believe
We can be richer than industry
As long as we know that there's things that we
don't really need
We can speak louder than ignorance
Cause we speak in silence every time our
eyes meet.

*On and on, and on, and on it goes
The world it just keeps spinning
Until I'm dizzy, time to breathe
So close my eyes and start again anew.*

I wanna see through all the lies of society
To the reality, happiness is at stake
I wanna hold up my head with dignity
Proud of a life where to give means more than
to take
I want to live beyond the modern mentality
Where paper is all that you're really taught to
create

Do you remember the forgotten America?
Justice, equality, freedom to every race?
Just need to get past all the lies and hypocrisy
Make up and hair to the truth behind every
face

Then look around to all the people you see,
How many of them are happy and free?

I know it sounds like a dream
But it's the only thing that can get me to sleep
at night
I know it's hard to believe
But it's easy to see that something here isn't
right
I know the future looks dark
But it's there that the kids of today must carry
the light.

On and on...

*Oxygen is taken from Willy Mason's debut album
Where the Humans Eat (Virgin 2004). The single
reached No 23 in the charts. Willy Mason is 20.*

Don't give, just think!

The idea of Breathe isn't to add to a galaxy of charities, to clog up your diary or drain your bank account. Breathe is a space to think. We'd love to hear your comments and suggestions. We aim to send out bulletins several times a year – not too often and not too much to read. Like most things, we like it simple! If you let us know your details, we could send our next bulletin by email or in the post. Watch out, too, for further developments in Breathe that you could be part of.

My details

(If you want us to
keep you in touch)

Name

Email

Address

breathe@fish.co.uk

Breathe c/o 68 Elgin Rd, Croydon CR0 6XA

Q & A

Which is better, to save time or to save money?

Send in your answer...

Dear Breathe,

I'm encouraged by your foray into the area of simpler living, something I'd like to do more, but always find myself caught in tension. Sometimes I'm just not sure what actions would really lead to a simpler lifestyle.

I have a cleaner because with a very busy job it frees me up to spend more time with my family and for commitments in my community. I have a washing machine and a dishwasher to make my life "simpler". I tend to buy books to read when I go on holiday because it is easy (simple?), but arguably it would simpler (?) to borrow them from the library. How can I understand what is the "simple" answer to my tensions?

Yours

David (Ealing)

Get in touch... Breathe isn't a finished product. We're really keen to hear suggestions and comments. Please send any ideas for articles, top tips, or Q & A answers to the address on page 3 or breathe@fish.co.uk

Top Tips

Simple living would be easy if this wasn't such a complicated world. Some of these tips are given to make you laugh, but hopefully some will make you think, too.

1. **Save water - share baths with your neighbours**
2. **Buy lots of new clothes, wear them once, then take them back for a refund. They'll never know! (Warning: leave the labels in and try not to sweat too much)**
3. **Don't buy a CD, share it with a friend and swap it every so often.**
4. **Don't buy the latest Christian book. Read the ones you already have first. If they still don't look worth a read yet, give them away!**
5. **Save on mushrooms - cut up old socks to use on pizza**
6. **Follow speed limits on the road. Ask yourself, hasn't God given me enough time for what I need to do?**

Ad-Watch: Adidas '1' The Intelligent Shoe

I'm willing to be proved wrong about this.

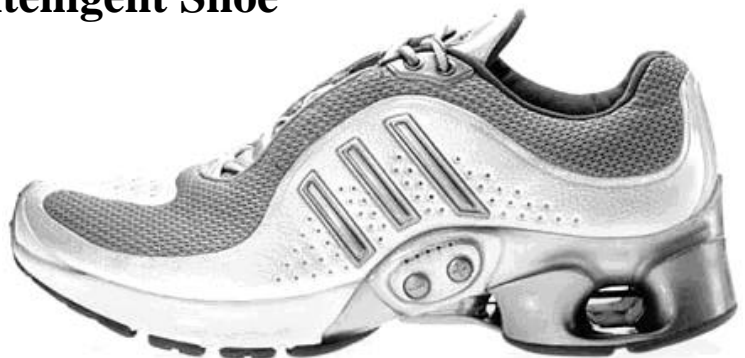
It could be that one day a computerized shoe will save someone's life. A reckless jogger might misjudge a piece of turf and narrowly avoid multiple hernias because his trainer adjusted automatically to the terrain.

But I guess people aren't generally worried about that. So how can Adidas persuade us to part with what will probably be around £200 for their new intelligent adjusting shoe, known simply as '1'?

The TV ad for the Adidas '1' takes place at night. A man takes his shoes to bed and dreams (this is a dream shoe).

Why take your shoes to bed? Because, presumably, your trainers are so important. Though just possibly it's because he's worried about them being nicked. Anyway, the shoes are certainly useful. In his dream the man can run anywhere: up, down, through woods, away from a bear (!). The huge price tag promises entry into a fantasy world where, as the slogan claims, 'impossible is nothing'. So that's what Adidas are offering: that great modern dream - freedom.

Of course, how free you'll actually feel wearing these shoes is anyone's guess. Especially once the initial sheen has faded and the batteries run out. Which leaves us with a question: in a world where some cannot eat, do we really need intelligent shoes? When I think about it like that, it seems so clear. The dream turns out to be one I've had before. It promises to set me free if I buy the latest new thing, to give me value if I wear something expensive. But in the morning I wake up. And the trainers are just trainers, my wallet is lighter, and one freedom I did have - the freedom to use that money for good - has now been lost. How intelligent is that?



Almighty God, you created all time and all space

Help us to find some for you