

Curing Affluenza Study Guide

Introduction

Many of us are ready to simplify our lives, but who has the time to do it? Or the will! Or the know-how!

Being an on-the-go consumer is as American as apple pie. It keeps the economy strong. But what is it doing to us and those we love? Some people are saying it has made us sick with a disease they cleverly call “affluenza.”

In his warm and engaging way, Tony Campolo tells us about a cure that’s actually documented in the Bible. Most of us already know something about that cure. “Sell all you have and give it to the poor.” But we think, and sometimes say, “Surely Jesus didn’t mean this literally!” Or, “We live in a more complicated day when you just can’t do some of the things Jesus talked about!”

But Tony says we can and he tells us how. He tackles such forbidden subjects as our money and our time and our stuff. He’s really telling us that we must simplify in order to live fully and that simplicity is a path to the abundant life Jesus said he came to bring.

The Leader

Tony Campolo is Professor of Sociology and Director of Urban Studies at Eastern College in St. David’s, Pennsylvania. He is also associate pastor of the Mount Carmel Baptist Church in West Philadelphia and serves as an associate for International Ministries of American Baptist Churches. For ten years he was on the faculty at the University of Pennsylvania. He did his undergraduate work at Eastern College and earned his PhD from Temple University.

He is founder and president of the Evangelical Association for the Promotion of Education, an organization involved in education, medical and economic development in a number of developing countries, including Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Perhaps best known as a dynamic preacher and speaker, Tony is in great demand on college and university campuses as well as in corporate and business communities.

He is a best-selling author with 25 books currently in print. His weekly cable TV program “Hashing It Out,” is carried into 28 million homes on the Odyssey Channel.

About “Affluenza”

Definition: The American epidemic of shopping, overwork, debt and the pursuit of money. The term was coined by Jesse H. O’Neill, a psychotherapist specializing in wealth-related issues, and a nationally-recognized authority on the psychology of affluence.

About the Videos

In each of the six programs, Tony presents his thoughts to an on-screen group gathered in a retreat setting. The group members raise questions—hopefully, these will be yours as well. At the end of the program Tony poses a question and you, the viewing group, take up the discussion.

About the Guide

The purpose of this guide is to help your group engage in a discussion about the issues raised in the videos. Pages 3 and 4 contain overviews of the six programs, with Bible passages cited in each program. You may want to copy and hand these out at the beginning of the series so viewers can read and reflect on the Bible passage in advance. Beginning on page 5 are outlines of Tony's main points and of the on-screen discussion to help viewers recall what was said by whom, as the group begins its own discussion. You may want to copy and hand out the outline for each program after viewing the video.

An Approach to Viewing

These videos can be used by groups or individuals. If you use the series with a group, these suggestions may help.

1. Preview each video before showing it.
2. Try out the VCR and the TV to be sure they're in good working order and cue up the tape to the opening.
3. To help structure the discussion, you might consider dividing the group into three teams, asking each team to view the video from a particular stance:
 - a. Confirmers – look for things you agree with (“that speaks to me.” “I’ve felt like that,” “I’ve wanted to try that,” “That’s important,” “Right on!”)
 - b. Challengers- look for questions to explore; not negative critics, but really testers – (“Will that really help?” “What are the costs?” “Could ordinary people do that?” “What would happen if lots of people made that choice?”)
 - c. Implementers – look for things that could be acted on (There’s something we could try,” “That’s relevant for our town, church, group, family.” “I’d like to join others in starting something like that.”)

Program Overview

1. Abundant Life: What Is It?

Addresses how we can have a better life.

Bible References:

Matthew 5:1-12; Luke 6:20-36;
Mark 4:1-20; Isaiah 55:2-3;
Romans 12:1-2; Mark 10:17-31;
Galatians 5:13-25; I Corinthians 7:
Luke 12:16-34

2. Money: How Poor Does Jesus Want Us to Be?

Looks at Jesus' teachings about wealth and explores taking them seriously in a consumer society.

Bible references:

Matthew 19:16-24; Matthew 25:31-46;
Matthew 5, 6, 7; Matthew 16:24ff;
I John 3:16-18; James 5; Acts 2:41-47;
Philippians 3:13-14

3. Time: How Much Do I Have to Give Away?

Explores spending our time in keeping with our values.

Bible References:

Luke 14:15-24; Mark 6:20; Ephesians 6:12

4. Stuff: How Much Can I Have?

Looks at issues of how much can we keep; what we can spend on art and beauty, how we respond to people in need.

Bible Reference:

James 2:14-16; Luke 7:36-50;
Matthew 22:1-10; Leviticus 25

5. Support: What Will Help?

Suggests sources of help for changing our lifestyles.

Bible References:

Ephesians 6:10-20;
Matthew 23:31-46;
Galatians 6:1-10;
Matthew 6:25-34;
Luke 1:46-55 esp. 52-53;
Matthew 6:20-36;
Luke 5:1-12; Acts 2

6. Next: What Do I Do Come Monday Morning?

Explores how to live this out in the real world.

Bible References:

Matthew 10;
Matthew 19:23-26;
Romans 8

1. Abundant Life: What Is It?

Tony's Main Points

1. In Luke's version of the Beatitudes, Jesus describes a simple lifestyle which he says will be fulfilling.
2. Our affluent lifestyle is deadening our souls and spirits; it enslaves us.
3. We have to establish a lifestyle that's reasonable and after that give sacrificially for others. John Wesley: "Work as hard as you can to earn as much as you can, to spend as little as you can, in order to give away all you can."
4. Really scary that consumer products are sold to us on the basis that they will satisfy our spiritual needs.
5. Wealth creates anxiety, Jesus says, "Don't sweat it. Seek first the Kingdom of God."
6. Young people are aware that the system is oppressive. If we lose this generation to church, it will be because we haven't demanded enough.

Discussion Outline

Tony: How to live, given the call of Scripture and the demands of our consumer society?

Karen: How to begin? Kid who planned to be a drug dealer.

Tony: I have a hard time telling poor people they shouldn't want stuff.

Jeff: This desire was built brick by brick, commercial after commercial.

Tony: Disease called "affluenza." Colson says rich people know money doesn't solve problems.

Jeff: Rich also have ability to leave.

Tony: Do you want to be fulfilled?

Tom: At heart of Gospel is giving up everything.

Tony: "Love God and do as you please."

Neil: Ghandi and the book collection.

Tony: Not everyone can live like St. Francis.

Forrest: Family image has much to do with how kids grow up.

Tony: Don't have to spend money to have quality of family life.

Jeff: Third world people have a greater sense of connectedness.

Tony: The poor know they have to depend on one another.

Jeff: Need to guard against romanticizing the poor.

Tony: Bible does say the poor are more open to the Gospel; story of the rich fool.

Tony's Question:

The world teaches us to build beautiful houses and accumulate a lot of things. But Jesus says to risk everything, give it away: there's the abundant life. Are you willing and are we ready to take that risk?

Other Ideas to Talk About

What is a reasonable lifestyle?

Does your idea of the good life differ from Jesus' teachings?

2. Money: How Poor Does Jesus Want Us to Be?

Tony's Main Points

1. Rich young ruler; we often hear “sell all that you have” interpreted as to “get your priorities straight”; Charlie the doctor.
2. Jesus' description of judgment day: “If you failed to do it to any of these...”
3. American dream is get a good education to get a good job to make lots of money to buy lots of stuff.
4. What it means to be a Christian is not accepting doctrine, but following Jesus.
5. Have churches accommodated to the American dream?
6. 900 verses of Scripture deal with how we should use our wealth – give it away.
7. Are we committed to following Jesus in the radical way the Bible says?

Discussion Outline

Tony: Are we really followers?

Neil: The victim of a drive-by badgering.

Tony: Christianity is a process.

Judy: Doesn't the rich young ruler have special problems with wealth?

Tony: Message is to all of us.

Judy: Can I not deny myself and still have?

Tony: I John 3:16 responds.

Karen: What about preachers who say God wants his people to prosper?

Tony: In Old Testament there was a prosperity theology.

Sandra: Prophets also talked about justice & giving to poor.

Tom: Prophets said take care of poor – not become poor.

Tony: Old Testament versus New Testament lifestyles.

Tom: To give all isn't to surrender.

Tony: Could make giving away money a legalism.

Jeff: Does Jesus want everyone to be poor?

Tony: The church should help.

Neil: Some churches do help.

Forrest: Church is not an alternative community to consumerism.

Tom: Can't ignore legitimate material needs.

Tony: We're using wealth not to fill needs but to gratify artificially created desires.

Tony's Question:

Does Jesus really expect us to give away everything in order to enter the Kingdom of God? How much are we allowed to keep?

Other Ideas to Talk About

Can we reconcile “the American dream” with Jesus' call to discipleship?

What qualifies one as a Christian?

3. Time: How Much Do I Have to Give Away?

Tony's Main Points

1. One of Jesus' parables of the Kingdom is a story about a banquet and no one comes, because they don't have time.
2. Not much of a Sabbath left anymore; Mother Teresa when she prays: "I don't say anything": if anything needs to change about our lifestyle, it's that there's no time for stillness.
3. Giving away money is easy. Giving time is another thing.

Discussion Outline

Judy: Hierarchy of time.

Tony: Entertaining angles unaware...church becomes instrument or world by demanding our time.

Tom: Sabbath is high point of my week.

Tony: Those around us are sacramental.

Jeff: Only break in week is when I should be in church.

Tony: Culture glorifies this hectic lifestyle.

Judy: Are you plugged in yet?

Sandra: Enjoy the journey.

Tony: Most important is whatever I'm doing now.

Forrest: Putting up basketball goal.

Tony: What kid really wanted was you.

Forrest: Pastor who delayed worship to pray on phone with family whose son had died.

Jeff: "Beat it, kid. I'm busy."

Tony: Less time working to get money; more time for people, relationships, intimacy.

Karen: Friend who wasted my time.

Tony: TV; ultimate demonic instrument for the consumption of time.

Forrest: TV robs us of imagination.

Tony: Poets understood how to live life with awareness.

Judy: Next day we have no past.

Tony: Exhaust my time doing good.

Jeff: Time audit

Tony: Learn from Amish.

Tony's Question:

A man wanted to follow Jesus but first he wanted to go home and take care of business. Jesus said: "You don't have time for that; drop everything and follow me." How does that apply to you? What do you have time for?

Other Ideas to Talk About

Talk about the Sabbath. How do you or might you "keep" it?

What do you not have time for that you want to add? What will you drop to allow time for the addition?

How much discretionary time do you have? If you had more, who besides yourself would benefit?

4. Stuff How Much Can I Have?

Tony's Main Points

1. Choosing which 50 kids in Haiti would get medical care.
2. To be Christian is to turn away from the stuff.
3. Turn your eyes on Jesus and the stuff of the world will grow dim. Kids looking through restaurant window.

Discussion Outline

Tony: Stuff and what it's doing to us.

Sandra: Story about woman and daughter in shopping mall.

Forrest: Christians want things they see.

Tony: Just goes right by them.

Forrest: Maybe they see a contradiction.

Tony: How does a country with 5% of world's population consume 43% of world's resources?

Forrest: Revise what we produce and who we produce it for.

Tony: Expect to earn \$50,000 a year describing a man who went to the cross!"

Tom: Some things that cost a lot of money are essential and beautiful.

Tony: Look at cathedral

Tom: The woman and the ointment.

Tony: Judas sounds like me; how does beauty play into lives of the poor?

Jeff: Commissioned a mural.

Tony: Symphony in Port-au-Prince; Does God do things with a flair? Leviticus 25-tithing for a party.

Sandra: Groceries for children.

Jeff: What happened to blanket?

Tony: To "need a dollar": 1) carry packet of McDonalds' coupons; 2) give money; unpackage our lives and travel light.

Tony's Questions:

You've seen a bumper sticker that says, "He who dies with the most toys wins." How much stuff do you have to give away? How much stuff can you keep without losing your soul?

Other Ideas to Talk About

Can a Christian own a BMW?

What does it mean to you that Jesus referred to the kingdom as a banquet?

Have you experienced "thin places" where God has broken through?

How do you control compulsive shopping?

5. Support: What Will Help?

Tony's Main Points

1. Ask God to take charge of your life. Story of the bum with coffee.
2. Transformational travel – live among third-world people.
3. Support group – a “plausibility structure” that reminds us we are called to live a radical life for Christ.
4. Finally, gotta get into the Bible – the most radical book to come down the pike. Prescription for a revolutionary lifestyle.

Discussion Outline

Tony: Ministers afraid to preach the hard saying of Jesus.

Forrest: Don't build churches on liberation Gospel.

Tony: All through the Bible, God always sides with the poor.

Sandra: Group of kids painted house.

Tony: Little problems solved if we care for the big problems.

Tom: Central teaching of Jesus is what blocks us from God.

Tony: Bonhoeffer built social ethic on the beatitudes. Learn about the world. Fish from Peru for dog food.

Jeff: Dog with toys while children in Nicaragua have no toys.

Tony: Not just dog – whole complex.

Jeff: Constantly have to make compromises. How in relationships?

Tony: Whole family should build budget.

Forrest: Lives not vision-driven out of Gospel.

Jeff: How do we negotiate real differences in interpretation of Gospel?

Tony: Wrong to impose a sacrificial lifestyle on others.

Tony's Question:

If you want to live a simple life for Christ, where do you get help? Where do you get support? Where do you get encouragement?

Other Ideas to Talk About

Tony says Jesus is more radical than the Communist Manifesto. What do you think?

What's your model for the way a family makes decisions about money?

What do you think about developing a family vision statement?

The dog food story has no easy answers. Talk about it.

There may be a concerned group in your church or community that would provide support. Would you consider organizing one?

6. Next: What Do I Do Come Monday Morning?

Tony's Main Points

1. We can talk about Christian lifestyle but have to live it. Kierkegaard's story about the duck church. Scripture says it's better not to know truth than to know it and not do it. Story about the fireman and the people with squirt guns.
2. Jesus does call us to radical commitment; must not water it down. St. Francis and Mother Teresa have it right.
3. But I'm a middle-range Christian on a journey.
 - a. Five ex-students live in a poor neighborhood in Philadelphia; use their free time to work in neighborhood.
 - b. Students take a year off to live in poor neighborhoods and go from door to door saying, "we're here because we want to pray for you. What do you need?"

Discussion Outline

Tom: Understanding is half the cure.

Tony: Need to talk about conversion.

Forrest: Need to deal with my cultural addictions; one is consumer debt.

Tony: Could Peter have followed Jesus if he'd had a credit card?

Forrest: For most people future had been mortgaged.

Tony: Churches can't give money for mission because they're praying for a new building.

Karen: One of my vices is shopping.

Tony: Unexamined life not worth living.

Judy: Hoarding.

Tony: Stuff involved us in a process that destroys the environment.

Sandra: Plan to talk about Christmas.

Tony: Answer to gas is "repent and be saved."

Tom: System creates a desire to buy things we don't need with money we don't have.

Tony: Son says you can't let TV in your house.

Karen: If we get rid of TV, kids will want it more.

Tony: Are we being led by the media or by the Holy Spirit? Story about Calcutta.

Tony's Question

How will you look for your Calcutta? That's a good question.

Other Ideas to Talk About

What is the radical commitment Tony says Jesus calls us to? How do we live it out?

Forrest talks about facing his cultural addictions. Do you have any?

For some suggestions for action, see the list on page 23.

Additional Resources

Organizations

Your denomination may have a missions board or a church and society board that would be a resource in this area.

The Affluenza Project: a recent and important resource offers information, publications, and counseling on affluenza, wealth-related issues, and associated addictive behaviors. The *Affluenza Project* can be accessed at <http://www.affluenza.com> or contact Jessie O’Neill, 890 North Upper River Road, River Hills, Wisconsin 53217. Phone: 414-351-8442 FAX: 414-351-4432

PBS “Affluenza” Special – One-hour special explores the epidemic of shopping, over-work, stress and debt that is affecting Americans in record numbers. Aired in September; sequel to be broadcast Spring 1998.

Ministry of Money. Supports growth in discipleship, compassion for the poor, and global stewardship by offering workshops, pilgrimages and a newsletter. 2 Professional Drive, Suite 220, Gaithersburg, MD 20879.

Books

Foster, Richard. *Freedom of Simplicity*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1981. Presents a spiritual discipline for achieving simplicity.

Miller, Timothy. *How to Want What You Have: Discovering the Magic and Grandeur of Ordinary Existence*. New York: Avon Books, The Hearst Corporation. 1995. A cognitive psychotherapist outlines exercises for overcoming our natural but destructive tendency to want more.

St. James, Elaine. *Inner Simplicity. Simplify Your Life. Living Simply Every Day*. New York: Hyperion. All three books are practical, based on experience, and aware of the spiritual dimensions of simplification.

Burch, Mark A. *Simplicity: Notes, Stories and Exercises for Developing Unimaginable Wealth*. Order from New Society Press. 1-800-567-6772. Outlines an approach to voluntary simplicity as a way of life that offers great promise for our future.

Elgin, Duane. *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life That Is Outwardly Simple, Inwardly Rich*. New York: William Morrow 1993. The “bible” of the simplicity movement, it tells how simplicity will transform approaches to work, relationships, leisure time and community involvement.

Boorstein, Sylvia. *Don’t Just Do Something: Sit There*. San Francisco: Harper. 1996. A mindfulness retreat. A step-by-step concrete plan for letting go of “busy-ness” and awakening to the happiness of the uncomplicated moment.

Chittister, Joan. *There Is A Season*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 1995. This meditation in art and words on the famous text from Ecclesiastes shows how fulfillment comes not from getting and having more, but from valuing what we have.

Videos

Love the Earth and Be Healed. Six videos with study guide. A thorough and informative exploration of environmental issues, firmly grounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition and concern for the earth. EcuFilm (800-251-4091).

The System Belongs to God. Seven videos with study guide. A biblical and theologically based study of the spiritual forces that sustain unjust and destructive systems. An affirmation of God's claim on these systems and on God's power to redeem them which enables us to engage them. EcuFilm (800-251-4091).

A Non-Exhaustive List of Suggestions You Can Do to Take Seriously the Gospel Call to Be in Partnership with the Poor and Marginalized.

Wrestle with God's Word in Scripture.

Wrestle with God in prayer.

Ride the bus for a month. Make some new friends there.

Shop in thrift shops, pawn shops and dollar stores for three months.

Go to jail and make some new friends there. And keep going back.

Tutor in a children's program or an adult literary program.

Volunteer at a battered women's shelter

Organize a project to build a Habitat for Humanity house with your church and the family who will own and occupy the house.

Invite some persons who are homeless to worship with you.