

SESSION 5

GERM WARFARE

Cleansing Our Lives of Cultural Toxins

In America, it is hard to distinguish Christianity from its social and cultural setting. it blends into the scenery.

Thomas C. Oden, *The Christian Advocate*

GROUP DISCUSSION A key part of getting to know God better is sharing your journey with others.

Briefly check in with each other about your experiences since the last session ...or as a result of the last session. For example:

- What insights did you discover in your personal study or in the chapter you read from the Soul Detox book?
- How did the last session impact your daily life or your relationship with God?
- What questions would you like to ask the other members of your group?

VIDEO NOTES GERM WARFARE. As you watch, use the outline below to follow along or to take notes on anything that stands out to you.

NOTES

Cultural toxins are things that may be culturally acceptable but actually hurt our souls.

“Like a muddied spring or polluted well is a righteous man who gives way to the wicked” (Prov. 25:26 NIV)

We need to take an inventory of what we consume from culture – books, articles, websites, music, movies, friends, etc.

Just because something is common behavior doesn't make it right.

“Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what He wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you” (Romans 12:2 MSG)

Is culture bringing out the best in me or is it dragging me down to a lower level of maturity?

A caution: We must fight against the temptation to become legalistic in this process.

Just because we could – do something, watch something, see something, go somewhere – doesn’t mean we should.

“Everything is permissible for me – but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible for me – but I will not be mastered by anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12 NIV)

How do we know what is beneficial, helpful and acceptable in all the things we consume?

“Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:21 NIV)

Test everything by asking two questions;

1. Am I being entertained by sin?

2. Does this draw me closer to God or does it draw me away from Him?

Our perception of what’s pleasing to God could be very different from what actually is pleasing to God.

God's Word is our "white balance"

GROUP DISCUSSION Let's talk about what we just watched.

1. What part of the teaching had the most impact on you

CULTURAL CONSUMPTION

2. Recall a few of your cultural choices over the last week or two. Consider the media you consumed, such as magazines, websites, books, movies, television shows, social media, games, apps, music, performances, etc.

Using your media choices as a reference point, how would you describe the dominant messages of your culture? Specifically, consider what the things you have read, watched, listened to, or experienced have communicated about at least three to five of the areas of life listed in the following chart.

ON THE TOPIC OF ...	THE DOMINANT MESSAGE OF MY CULTURE IS ...
<i>EXAMAPLE: Money</i>	<i>Get all you can and spend all you can.</i>
Money	
How to handle conflict	
Marriage	
Happiness	
Sex	
Success	
Appearance/beauty	
Work	

How would you describe the impact these cultural messages have on you?

3. Following are three definitions of "culture." We will have three different people read each definition aloud. As the definitions are read, underline any words or phrases that stand out to you. You may wish to read throught the list twice to give everyone time to listen and respond.

The artistic and social pursuits, expression, and tastes valued by a society or class, including the arts, manners, dress, etc.

The attitudes, feelings, values, and behavior that characterize and inform society as a whole or any social group within it.

The totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought. Culture is learned and shared within social groups and is transmitted socially.

- **What words or phrases stood out to you? WHY?**

- *Culture is a system of beliefs and values. Participating in a culture constitutes agreement with and promotion of its beliefs and values. Do you agree or disagree with these statements? In what cases, if any, would you make an exception to your position? Share the reasons for your response.*

CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

4. In a familiar passage from Romans, the apostle Paul acknowledges the stunting influence that following cultural norms can have on our ability to know and follow God:

*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will.
(Romans 12:2)*

On the DVD, Craig read this same passage from *The Message*:

Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what He wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you (Romans 12:2 MSG)

- **To what degree would you say that your cultural choices – about the media you consume, clothes you wear, language you use, etc. – are ones you make without even thinking? Choose a number on the continuum below and briefly describe your response.**

1

2

3

4

5

To a minimal degree
I am very aware of and intentional about all of my cultural choices.

To a moderate degree
I am occasionally aware of and intentional about some of my cultural choices

To a great degree
I am rarely aware of or intentional about any of my cultural choices.

- **Now identify an area in which you are having a hard time spiritually (for example, an inability to trust God with a problem, trouble connecting with God in prayer, difficulty establishing a regular practice of spiritual disciplines, a struggle with temptation, etc). Briefly name your struggle for the group and then discuss together the questions below:**

1) What are the dominant messages your culture might give you about this issue? For example, "If you're busy, you're important," might be a cultural message for someone who struggles to make time for a regular practice of prayer. Or "You only live once!" might be a cultural message for someone who struggles with a temptation. (As a reference, you may wish to recall some of your responses to question 2 on page 4 (what words or phrases stood out).

2) How might these cultural messages complicate your struggle, or make it difficult for you to allow God to use your struggle to bring out the best in you?

TEST EVERYTHING

5. When it comes to making decisions about what is beneficial and acceptable, the biblical wisdom is, "Test everything" (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22). On the DVD, Craig said he tests his cultural choices by asking two questions:

Am I being entertained by sin?

Does this draw me closer to God or does it draw me away from God?

- **When you think about your cultural choices over the last day or two, which pass the two-question test? Which fail?**
- **Do you think it's possible for the answer to the second question to be "neither"? In other words, is it possible for some things to be neutral, having neither a positive nor negative impact on spiritual growth and maturity? Why or why not?**

WRAP-UP

6. Discuss what you've learned and experienced together throughout the Soul Detox curriculum.

- **What would you say is the most important thing you learned? How has it impacted you (for example, in your attitudes, behaviors, relationships, etc)?**
- **How have you recognized God at work in your life through the study? What do you sense God's invitation to you might be?**

- At the end of every session, you had an opportunity to talk about what you needed from the other members of the group and how you could be good companions for one another. What changes, if any, have you noticed in the ways you interact with each other now compared to the beginning of the curriculum?

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY: What I Want To Remember

Complete this activity on your own.

1. Briefly review the outline and any notes you took.
2. In the space below, write down the most significant thing you gained in this session – from the teaching, activities, or discussion.

What I want to remember from this session ...