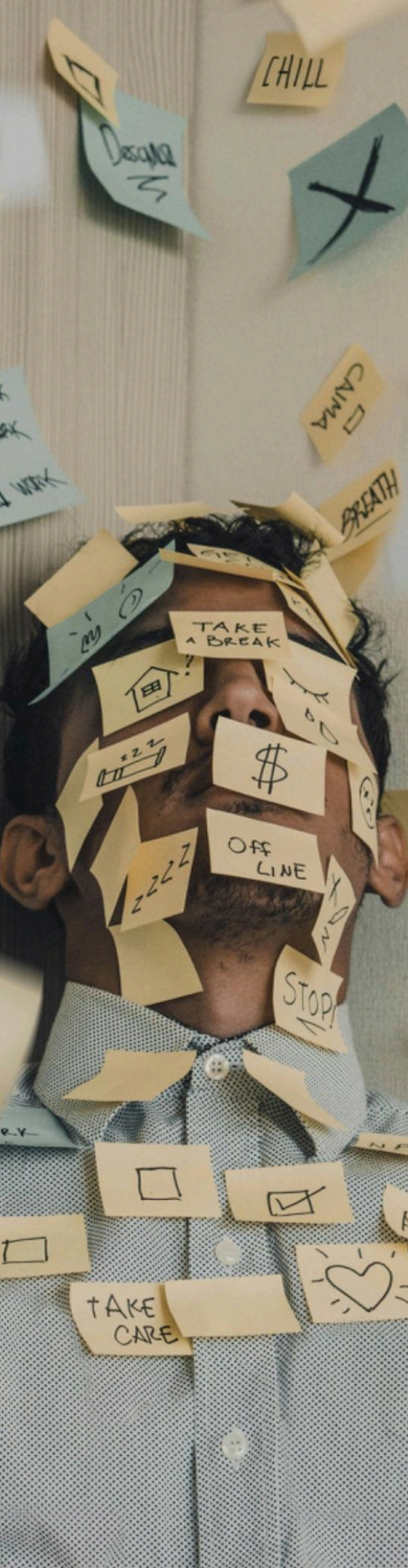


Session 7 – Guide

EDIFY: Shape Your Life for Good

How to Navigate a Toxic Culture



This guide provides takeaways, key questions, protocols and further study recommendations to help deepen your understanding and application of the session's content.

Setting the Stage

Introduction

In this session, we dive deep into understanding the contrast between thriving and toxic cultures. We'll explore biblical blueprints for a flourishing culture, contrast them with modern toxic environments, and provide practical steps for navigating these challenges. By examining the Genesis ideal for human relationships, work, and life, we aim to equip participants with tools to thrive despite being surrounded by harmful cultural influences.

What is Culture?

Culture is the shared system of values, beliefs, behaviors, and practices that define how a group of people live and interact with their environment. It can take various forms:

1. **Agricultural Culture:** A system designed to cultivate life, where work and rest come together to sustain growth.
2. **Laboratory Culture:** A controlled environment where specific elements grow and proliferate based on certain conditions, similar to how beliefs and values take root in a society.
3. **Societal Culture:** The larger system of behaviors and norms that shape how communities interact with each other, influencing individual lives.

In every sense, culture is either fostering life and flourishing or contributing to decay and dysfunction.

Components of a Thriving Culture

1. Loving Attachments | Genesis 1:26

- **Definition:** Deep, meaningful relationships that reflect God's love for us and foster mutual respect and care.
- **Impact:** Loving attachments help form healthy personal identities and secure communities.

2. Meaningful Work and Rest | Genesis 2:15

- **Definition:** Productive labor balanced with intentional rest, both springing from and reinforcing healthy relationships.
- **Impact:** True rest leads to peace, renewal, and healthy attachments, both with God and others.

3. Proliferation of Life | Genesis 1:28

- **Definition:** The multiplication of healthy relationships, communities, and life-giving environments that mirror the growth seen in Eden.
- **Impact:** When relationships and work are aligned with God's design, life naturally flourishes.

Components of a Toxic Culture

1. Fear/Shame-Based Attachments

- **Definition:** Relationships rooted in manipulation and dysfunction, where fear and shame drive interactions.
- **Symptoms:** Distrust, control, and manipulation take the place of loving, supportive connections.

2. Striving for Survival

- **Definition:** A culture of relentless competition, where self-centered ambition overrides care for others.
- **Symptoms:** Individuals feel they must "earn" their worth through performance, leading to burnout and strained relationships.

3. Restlessness

- **Definition:** The absence of peace and constant stress, stemming from an imbalance of work and rest.

- **Symptoms:** *People experience anxiety, exhaustion, and a lack of true rest due to the pressures of productivity without restoration.*

4. Proliferation of Trauma, Lies, and Disintegration

- **Definition:** *A culture that multiplies brokenness and division rather than life and flourishing.*
- **Symptoms:** *Relationships break down, truth is distorted, and the overall community suffers from mistrust and harm.*

Eden vs. Toxic Culture

In contrast to the life-giving nature of Eden, toxic cultures are characterized by an ever-increasing distance from God's design. Eden was meant to expand outward, bringing life and flourishing to the world, while toxic cultures shrink inward, leading to decay and disintegration.

Culture Check: Examining Your Culture

1. Relationship to Fear and Shame

- *How is shame handled in your culture? Is it avoided, denied, or weaponized against others?*
- *In a thriving culture, shame is recognized as an opportunity to reconnect and restore relationships, rather than being manipulated or used to control.*

2. Relationship to Work and Rest

- *How balanced is your culture between work and rest? Are people valued based on their productivity? Are relationships sacrificed for the sake of projects or mission?*
- *In a healthy culture, work flows from loving attachments, and rest serves to nurture those connections.*

3. What is Your Culture Multiplying?

- *Evaluate the fruits of your culture. Is it multiplying life and flourishing, or is it spreading trauma, division, and exhaustion?*
- *Matthew 7:16: "By their fruits you will know them." Use this principle to assess the outcomes of the environment you are in.*

Practical Protocols

Three ways to help navigate a toxic culture:

- 1. Cultivate Your Identity:** *Focus on who you are in Christ, rooted in loving and meaningful attachments with God and others. Be intentional about shaping your identity through these life-giving relationships rather than conforming to toxic cultural norms.*
- 2. Cultivate Your Agency:** *Recognize your power to make deliberate choices that align with God's principles, even in difficult environments. Set boundaries where needed and proactively influence your surroundings in a positive way.*
- 3. Cultivate Your Relationship with the Holy Spirit:** *Depend on the Holy Spirit to guide you in embodying the fruits of the Spirit, such as love, joy, and peace. Make daily efforts to renew your mind and spirit through prayer, Scripture, and rest, allowing God to restore and sustain you in navigating challenging cultural influences.*

Reflect and Respond

- **Personal Reflection:** Which components of a thriving culture do you feel are lacking in your life? How can you begin to cultivate them?
- **Identify Toxic Patterns:** What toxic elements have you identified in your current environment? How will you navigate these challenges moving forward?
- **Commit to Action:** Choose one practical step from the *Culture Check* or *Practical Protocols* sections to implement in your life this week. How will this help you foster a healthier, more life-giving environment?

Further Study

- Read **Genesis 1-2** - Study original blueprint human culture
- Read **Isaiah 1** - Explore how God addressed toxic culture
- Read [How Not To Be Weird](#) (blog) - by Ty Gibson
- Read [Culture Making](#) (book) - by Andy Crouch

