

SOUL SHAPER

The *Soul Shaper* is a convenient tool that takes the subject matter from the Spiritual Talk series and breaks it down even further. This self-study guide is also the source of lively discussions in our weekly Community Groups. You may download the accompanying Spiritual Talks or listen online at www.threadschurch.org. There's always a place for you in our Community Groups and our Worship Gatherings, Sunday at 9:15am or 11:00am, or Thursdays at 6pm. Questions? ...Email connect@threadschurch.org or call the office at 269.327.0445.



Community Week 4 (May 15/18)

We seek to practice forgiveness and reconciliation, honor, encouragement, humility, and hospitality in all of our relationships. We are committed to taking the journey of faith in unity with our sisters and brothers.

42 All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper, and to prayer. 43 A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. 44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. 45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. 46 They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity 47 all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. – Acts 2:42-47

19 So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. 20 Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. 21 We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. 22 Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit. – Ephesians 2:19-20

Questions:

- Read this passage from Acts carefully. What did life together look like in the ancient church? Who was called to be community with one another?
- What would this look for us in 2008?
- Is eating together a core aspect of community? Why or why not?
- Look at each of the elements of community mentioned in Acts: Apostles' teaching, live together, common meal and prayer. How are these core aspects of community expressed within your community group each week?
- Why does Paul choose these as the part of life to be shared in community?
- How might a biblical community committed to prayer look different from other groups of people?

On the Journey . . .

The picture Paul paints of community looks different from the kind of "community" we might try to find in other contexts. The way of life described in Acts is a glimpse of individuals who experience unity through sharing life. They are the church. Shane Clairborne writes of how he experienced Christ's church through community in his book, *Irresistible Revolution; living as an ordinary radical*. He says, "The body of Christ was alive, no longer trapped in

stained-glass windows or books of systematic theology. The body of Christ was literal, living, hungry, thirsty, bleeding. Church was no longer something we did for an hour on Sunday, and church was not a building with a steeple . . . She came to life. The church became something we are – an organism, not an organization. Church became so fresh and vibrant, it was like we had brought something dead back to life.”

The church is something we can experience only when we jump in with both feet, beginning to live life in community with those whose lives may look very different from our own. Church isn't something you can experience passively, it is something you must encounter moving forward in your Journey. This week take some time to evaluate how you are experiencing Christ's church. Has it become that living, breathing organism for you or is it an organization you visit once a week? What will your next step be toward an experience with a living church? Decide on one real way you can take a step toward the common-unity with others in which you can come to know the church, the way she was envisioned by Christ.

Presence **Week 5 (May 22/25)**

To daily be with Jesus. Followership involves being with the master. It is helpful to think about how we can be with Jesus. We seek the fruitfulness and guidance of the Spirit that comes from being centered and surrendered to the will and presence of our Creator.

²⁹ After Jesus left the synagogue with James and John, they went to Simon and Andrew's home. ³⁰ Now Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a high fever. They told Jesus about her right away. ³¹ So he went to her bedside, took her by the hand, and helped her sit up. Then the fever left her, and she prepared a meal for them.

³² That evening after sunset, many sick and demon-possessed people were brought to Jesus. ³³ The whole town gathered at the door to watch. ³⁴ So Jesus healed many people who were sick with various diseases, and he cast out many demons. But because the demons knew who he was, he did not allow them to speak.

Jesus Preaches in Galilee

³⁵ Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray. ³⁶ Later Simon and the others went out to find him. ³⁷ When they found him, they said, "Everyone is looking for you." –Mark 1:29-37

Questions:

- What is it you would have to pull away from? How would you do that? Is there a space (time/place) that helps you to do that?
- If God's love letter gives us examples of Christ pulling away to be present with God, how essential a practice do you think it is for us?

¹⁰ "Be still, and know that I am God!

I will be honored by every nation.

I will be honored throughout the world." –Psalm 46:10

- How can you improve your community group time together to be one of intense prayer? How can you be more intentional about making it a place for pulling away as a group to experience the presence of God?

Instead of discussing the ideas of prayer and meditation this week. Let's practice it. Let's experiment with one way we can collectively rest in God's presence. In our community groups and friendships we often share the events of the week and then pray for one another. This week, try something a little different. Instead of sharing

with one another and then moving into prayer, move God into the center of the room and share your praises and prayers directly with God, being present for one another, and supporting one another or celebrating together by praying for one another after each has shared through prayer directly with God.

On the Journey . . .

This week, find something, a scripture or a song or a prayer or an exercise, that helps you to bring your mind into the presence of God, use it. Return to it as long as there is still revelation left in it. Sometimes we feel that we should move on to other things, when in reality God wants us to park somewhere for a while and stay there. Meditate on revelation as long as there is still life flowing from it. When all the life is drawn from it, move on, and seek God anew. For instance, if a verse of scripture speaks to you, and you sense God's presence, don't feel that you have to rush on and read the rest of your chapter for the day. Stop there. Write it down. Carry it with you. Post it in your car, on your mirror, on your desk at work.

Feed on the revelation that flows from those words; let them draw you to God. Once in His presence, stay there. Let God use the scripture to fill your mind, fill your heart, fill your being. Let God use it to fill whatever it is God wants to fill. After a week of experimenting with this way of coming close to God, step back and evaluate your week. Did you see a difference? Does it encourage you to continue in this practice?

Take time this week to be intentional about spending time in the presence of God, undisturbed by the busyness of life. Be intentional about moments of prayer.

Simplicity **Week 6 (May 29/June 1)**

The original lie is that the life we have been given is not enough. Simplicity embraces joy and contentment in seeing ourselves in a good story in a good world with a good God.

Questions:

There are whole magazines devoted to living simply. Ironically, many of the ads are about the stuff you will need to buy to make your life more simple. How do you think our culture misunderstands living simply? How do we overcomplicate it?

"This is all that I have learned: God made us plain and simple, but we have made ourselves very complicated." Ecclesiastes 7:29

- How do you see yourself complicating your life?
- How able is God to use us when we over complicate ourselves?
- How would our living more plain simple lives allow us to be more present in community with both God and one another?

²⁵ "That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? ²⁷ Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?

²⁸ "And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, ²⁹ yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. ³⁰ And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?"

³¹ "So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' ³² These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. ³³ Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. —Matthew 6:25-33

- The above passage from Matthew tells us not to worry about food and clothing and all the stuff we often wrap our lives around. Is this possible for you? Would there need to be a shift in your life to make you able to live more simply in this way.

"Simplicity is meaningful only inasmuch as it is grounded in love, authentic relationships, and interdependence." – Shane Clairborne, The Irresistible Revolution; living as an ordinary radical.

- How would being intentional about living simply affect your ability to live in real community with others? What kind of shift would it take for your heart to grow so that your love for community would extinguish your love for other things that become barriers to true community?

On the Journey . . .

This week take time to consider and pray over each of these elements of living simply. Where do you have the most work to do? What first steps can you take?

- I would keep careful record of my personal finances and living by a budget that reflects sustainability and Jesus' values, and I will share my income and expense reports with Threads' participants in an annual participant's gathering.
- I would seek to live a life that is focused, content, sustainable and generous. We would collectively take an inventory of our belongings and evaluate what to keep, share, sell or give away on an annual basis.
- I would live by a schedule that allows for our mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional selves to be replenished and available (weekly Sabbath, room for spontaneity, pace of life, conscientious commitments, etc.).
- I would give away at least ten percent of my finances (including bringing back to God ten percent of my income).

After a week of prayer and being intentional about considering each of these steps, share as a community what steps each of you are going to experiment with taking. As you do this, let your community know how it can support you in taking those steps. Check in with one another over time. How will you hold one another accountable?