

# 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](http://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](mailto:connect@threadschurch.org) or call the office at 269.327.0445.

**This Soul Shaper is part 1 of 2.**

## **Week 1 (April 24/27) – Half Full**

*So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. – John 1:14*

### **Questions:**

- Christ is the fullness of God's love, the "complete package" of what it looks like for God's love to be walked out in human form. From what you know of Christ's time on Earth, what are the things about his life that you would most like to emulate? Where do you see a fullness in him that you only see as half full in yourself?
- As you understand; what does it mean for you to "be a blessing to others?"
- Consider the life space you are currently in: your family, your neighborhood, your friends, co-workers, those in your community etc. What would it look like for you to be a blessing to those around you?
- If we hold up Christ as the standard against which we compare how fully we are living our lives as a blessing, are there ways in which you feel you fall short? How willing would you be to have another speak into your life in this area?
- What would you be willing to try for a period of time to practice being a "fuller" blessing to those around you?
- Would you be willing to submit yourself to the support and accountability of a group of Christ followers as you try to live out God's invitation to live more fully in his Kingdom here and now?
- As a community group, how will you support one another and hold one another accountable in living fuller lives, mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually?

### **On the Journey . . .**

*"Jesus said that we enter the kingdom of love by becoming like children again, eager to taste, explore, play and take risks. I know how happy I am to receive the earnestly scribbled drawings of my children, and I can't help but think that God is equally pleased with our bold and awkward gestures." – Mark Scandrette, Soul Graffiti*

*"God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." – 2 Timothy 1:7*

We only find out what is transformational through practice and experimentation. Identify one small step you could take in a "spirit of power" toward becoming mentally, emotionally, physically or spiritually fuller. Over the next week, walk this out. This could be an experiment that lasts for an hour, a day or the whole week. Be committed to completing your small step. Reflect on how successful you were. Is it something that you could continue, or would you need to alter in order for it to be successful in growing you toward fullness?

## Week 2 (May 1/4) - Obedience

### Parable of the Rich Fool

<sup>13</sup> Then someone called from the crowd, "Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father's estate with me." <sup>14</sup> Jesus replied, "Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that?" <sup>15</sup> Then he said, "Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own." <sup>16</sup> Then he told them a story: "A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. <sup>17</sup> He said to himself, 'What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops.' <sup>18</sup> Then he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. <sup>19</sup> And I'll sit back and say to myself, "My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!"' <sup>20</sup> "But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?' <sup>21</sup> "Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God." —Luke 12:13-21

### Questions:

- How do you make the major decisions in your life? Who do you include, if anyone, in your contemplation?
- Take a moment to remember the kind of fullness Jesus modeled for us. Is what he modeled something that we can live out in isolation?
- Read the passage from Luke, who is the farmer including in his decision making process
- What is Jesus criticizing in this passage? Why?
- Is this really about the size of barns? In what way was the farmer being disobedient in the way he is living and making his decisions?
- When you read in scripture or hear someone calling you to submit or obey, what is your reaction? Why do think that you react in that way?

<sup>44</sup> Jesus shouted to the crowds, "if you trust me, you are trusting not only me, but also God who sent me . . . <sup>49</sup> I don't speak on my own authority. The Father who sent me has commanded me what to say and how to say it. <sup>50</sup> And I know his commands lead to eternal life; so I say whatever the Father tells me to say. —John 12:44 & 49-50

- In this passage from John we get a picture of Christ's obedience to the father. If anyone should be able to decide things for themselves, it would be God, even in an earth-suit. But, Christ models the kind of obedience we should give to the Father. Does knowing that even Christ was obedient to someone else make you feel different about the idea of submitting to a God who demonstrates perfect love for us?
- Is it possible to ever grow our cup beyond half full if we are trying to do it outside of the example Jesus gave us for fullness through love? What is essential to his example?
- In some ways it may be easier to think about obeying or submitting to a God who is supposed to love us and want the best for us; but, what about the idea of letting others speak into your life. How does the idea of letting others trying to follow this Jesus speak into your life affect you?
- Is it easier to obey God when it is just the two of you one on one? OR, is it easier to obey God when you have others helping you along the way? Can you even obey God one on one?
- Based on the passage from Luke, How would Christ have us obey him in the way of love? How would this look in your life?

### On the Journey . . .

*"Many of our structures and venues for religious education are set up to be passive and cognitive rather than active and participatory. Most people, for instance, think of a church as a place to sit and listen—not a context in which they will be coached and stretched to practice new skills." — Mark Scandrette, Soul Graffiti*

Take some time this week to identify areas in which you would like to grow. Write them down. Choose one item and attempt to make a plan for that growth. Then go ahead and practice obedience in connecting with God by connecting with his people. Share one of these areas with your community group and ask for their discernment regarding your plan to begin this growth. How does this experiment stretch you? Does the coaching give you a sense of strength? Would it make a difference in your life to include community in your journey to grow toward fullness?

## Week 3 (May 8/11) – Missional

*2 I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. 3 I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.” – Genesis 12:2-3*

### Questions:

*21 Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, 22 throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. 23 Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. 24 Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy. 25 So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body. 26 And “don’t sin by letting anger control you.” Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 for anger gives a foothold to the devil. 28 If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need. 29 Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. 30 And do not bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. 32 Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. – Ephesians 4:21-32*

*16 We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. 17 If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person?*

*18 Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. – 1 John 3:16-18*

- Reading these passages from Ephesians and 1 John, what kind of love is being described?
- Is the love described in these passages an emotional love or are we being called on to demonstrate something other than emotion? Why would it make a difference?
- How is Christ glorified when we show this kind of love and care for those in need?

*12 Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. 13 Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful. –Colossians 3:12-15*

- Take a quick look at the passage from Genesis. Who is in the business of making “great nations”? How is it that we would come to be a blessing to others?
- Why is it important to listen to God before undertaking “projects” in the community?
- Why is it important to listen to the community before we undertake “projects” there?
- How is listening to God and the community a part of walking out the kind of love described in 1 John and Ephesians?

*43 “You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. 44 But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! 45 In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. 46 If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. 47 If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. 48 But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect. – Matthew 5:43-48*

*14 Bless those who persecute you. Don’t curse them; pray that God will bless them. 15 Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with each other. Don’t be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don’t think you know it all! 17 Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. 18 Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. 19 Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, “I will take revenge; I will pay them back,” says the Lord. 20 Instead, “If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give*

*them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.”<sup>21</sup> Don’t let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good. – Romans 12:14-21*

- Looking carefully at these passages from Mathew and Romans, how are Christ followers called to be a blessing to others?
- Why would living in this way show our love and allegiance to Christ?
- I john 3:16-18 calls us to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters, based on the kind of living described in Matthew and Romans, what is one way you can do this specific to your current life space?

### **On the Journey . . .**

God’s love letter gives us some pretty specific ways in which we can be a reflection of his love by how we treat all those in our life space. As an experiment, walk out the kind behavior described in the passages for this week. Remember, to walk this out in a spirit of power, love and self-discipline. Pray that God will identify where he would like to see you grow, and that he would give you the desire to change and the strength to become a better reflection of him.