

# 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 Sunday Worship Gatherings at 9:15am or 11:00am. Questions?...Email [connect@threadschurch.org](mailto:connect@threadschurch.org) or call the office at 269.327.0445.

## WHY ISN'T MY MARRIAGE A HAPPILY EVER AFTER?

**Marriage**  
**January 27, 2008**

Marriage is God's idea. But, each of us has our own idea of what happily-ever-after should look like. Is our idea of marriage as a fairy tale in the same idea that God had when He created the marriage blueprint for us? How can couples be on the same page with one another and with God, finding common unity in their ideas of what this adventure should look like?

*<sup>18</sup> Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him." <sup>19</sup> So, the Lord God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one. <sup>20</sup> He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky and all the wild animals. But still there was no helper just right for him. <sup>21</sup> So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the Lord God took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the opening. <sup>22</sup> Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to man. —Genesis 2:18-22*

### Ice Breaker:

What were your favorite fairy tales as a child, or what are they as an adult? Why were they your favorite? How do you think the tale shaped or warped your understanding of the world around you?

### Discussion:

What strikes you about this passage from Genesis?

#### ***The fairy tale of idealism . . .***

"If I get married, I'll be happy for the rest of my life."

#### ***The fairy tale of companionship . . .***

"I can't stand the thought of living alone for the rest of my life."

#### ***The fairy tale of sexual fulfillment . . .***

"Marriage means that I can enjoy sex anytime I want and never feel guilty or fearful."

#### ***The fairy tale of social acceptance . . .***

"My family and friends keep asking me, 'When are you going to settle down and get married?'"

- If you have married, what do you remember as being the reason for wanting to make that commitment? Did you or are you currently subscribing to one of the fairy tales listed above? If you have not married, for what reasons do you think that you may want to make that commitment to another individual?
- How close or far are your reasons from the design God lays out in his love letter?
- What is your reaction to the word "helper" God led Moses to choose regarding Eve?

*<sup>10</sup> Hear me, Lord and have mercy on me. Help me, O Lord. —Psalm 30:10*

*<sup>4</sup> But God is my helper. The Lord keeps me alive! —Psalm 54:4*

- Looking at these passages from Psalms? Is your impression of the word "helper" different than it was?
- What does it tell you about God's plan that He would create an aloneness in Adam that would not be filled by His presence?

Our culture tends to think of marriage as a social convention that should change and adapt to contemporary social trends. However, marriage is a relationship that God has designed and looks to us to build.

*Unless the Lord builds a house, the work of the builders is wasted. –Psalm 127:1*

- How does this idea contradict what are often our notions of marriage as a social convention?

There are a multitude of sitcoms on television that are profiting by looking at the differences between married couples and the antics that ensue. But this wasn't God's purpose in bringing two individuals together.

- What was his purpose in creating a union where there can sometimes be great differences? What can we learn from this part of His plan?

Some of the most loved sitcoms of all time focused on families living with children. We find great entertainment in watching another live through the challenges of growing a family. Our entertainment was not exactly what God had in mind.

*<sup>3</sup> Children are a gift from the Lord;  
they are a reward from him.*

*<sup>4</sup> Children born to a young man  
are like arrows in a warrior's hands.*

*<sup>5</sup> How joyful is the man whose quiver is full of them:  
He will not be put to shame when he confronts his accusers at  
the city gates. –Psalm 127:3-5*

*<sup>5</sup> For He issued his laws to Jacob;  
he gave his instructions to Israel.  
He commanded our ancestors  
to teach the to our children,*

*<sup>6</sup> so the next generation might know them –  
even the children not yet born –  
and they in turn will teach their children.*

*<sup>7</sup> So each generation should set its hope anew on God,  
not forgetting His glorious miracles  
and obeying his commands. –Psalm 78:5-7*

- What do these passages tell us about God's intention for us in growing our families?

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

Take time this week to pray about your understanding of God's plan for marriage. Ask God to work on your heart, so that you might be able to better see how His plan is or is not guiding this part of your journey. Take time to reflect on the most difficult aspect of His plan as you encountered it in the Spiritual Talk or through the discussion/reflection questions above. Take the opportunity to discuss your heart with your community group and encourage one another in growing toward God as together you better understand this part of His plan.

## Receive February 3, 2008

Building a marriage is like building a castle. Castles provide protection for the occupants inside. What are the four walls for building a castle that will provide safety for a husband and wife to build intimacy and oneness? What does it mean when we try to make a castle work with only two or three walls? Our first wall we put in place is the one we build when we accept our spouse as a gift from God.

*<sup>18</sup> Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him."<sup>19</sup> So, the Lord God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one.<sup>20</sup> He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky and all the wild animals. But still there was no helper just right for him.<sup>21</sup> So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the Lord God took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the opening.<sup>22</sup> then the Lord God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to man. –Genesis 2:18-22*

### Ice Breaker:

Describe for one another a blind date experience, or a first date experience you had in the past. Did you know about the person before hand? Were you surprised at your reaction to this person following an opportunity to get better acquainted?

### Discussion:

Why do you think that receiving a spouse as a gift from God, designed especially for you is one of the fundamental "four walls of the castle" God has put in place for marriage?

*<sup>21</sup> So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the Lord God took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the opening.<sup>22</sup> Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man.<sup>23</sup> "At last?" the man exclaimed. "This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken from 'man.'"<sup>24</sup> this explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.<sup>25</sup> Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame. –Genesis 2:21-25*

- How would seeing a spouse as a gift from God change your perspective about who that person is?
- On whom was Adam's response focused?
- How does this fundamental of marriage relate to the idea of loving all Jesus practiced throughout his lifetime and most fully in His death?

So, knowing that our spouse is a gift from God means that we need to have some understanding of what His plan is for us. Adam knew that Eve was God's plan for him.

- How will we know what God's plan for us is, especially in regard to marriage?
- Think about this, what would have happened if Adam had said "no" to God where Eve was concerned?

It would be easy to understand receiving our mate as a one-time decision. We make a decision to propose or to accept a proposal, but what does it look like to intentionally make that decision again each day of our lives? How does making that decision color all the ins and outs of living together with another person?

### On the journey. . .

Finish this sentence. "If my husband/wife is God's gift, then receiving him or her would mean that I should . . ."

## Leaving Mommy or Daddy's Castle February 10, 2008

The second wall we build for our castle is the wall that is put in place when we leave our parents. Although this doesn't mean that we physically ditch our mutual parents never to be seen or heard from again, it does mean that our spouse becomes our number two confidante our number two consideration, second only to Father God.

*<sup>18</sup> Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him."<sup>19</sup> So, the Lord God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one.<sup>20</sup> He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky and all the wild animals. But still there was no helper just right for him.<sup>21</sup> So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the Lord God took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the opening.<sup>22</sup> then the Lord God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to man.<sup>23</sup> "At last?" the man exclaimed. "This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken from 'man.'"<sup>24</sup> this explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.<sup>25</sup> Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame. – Genesis 2:18-25*

### Ice Breaker:

Can you remember the first time you went away from home to camp or for your first overnight stay? How did you feel? What about going away to school or work living away from your childhood home for the first time?

### Discussion:

- Think about the stress our culture puts on having the perfect fairy tale wedding day. What does our culture stress as the most important parts of "the big day?"
- Now, Look specifically at Genesis 2:22-24. What should be the most important part of a marriage celebration?
- Americans spend an exorbitant amount of time and money planning and preparing for a wedding. How much time and money would you estimate are spent planning for the marriage?
- Looking at Genesis 2:21-25, what do you think that God would say is the most important thing to be planning for? Where do Mom and Dad fit into this?

*<sup>12</sup> Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God is giving you. —Exodus 20:12*

- In Exodus God instructs us as to Mom and Dad's place in our lives as married couples. How is "honoring" your parents different from "depending upon" your parents?
- What does this separation from Mom and Dad look like played out in daily married life?

### On the Journey . . .

Take time this week to do a relationship check. Currently, what is your relationship to your family of origin? How much do you depend upon them? Are there places where you should be growing your independence?

For those who are married, are there ways in which you are depending upon your parents that you should be depending on your spouse and yourself? Are there instances in which you are giving your parents the allegiance you should be giving your spouse?

Take the time to pray. Ask God to identify those areas in which your allegiance is misplaced or your dependency needs to change. Ask him to give you the strength to make those changes.

## Superglue

February 17, 2008

The third wall of the castle becomes the one we put in place when we commit fully to our spouse. This is a bond, like superglue that joins two separate pieces creating one. God's plan recognizes that each individual is unique in his or her own right, and will forever remain so. But, when joined to a spouse, the two unique halves come together to form a whole that is even greater. Independently recognizable, but inseparably joined.

<sup>23</sup> "At last?" the man exclaimed. "This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken from 'man.'" <sup>24</sup> this explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one. <sup>25</sup> Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame. —Genesis 2:23-25

### Ice Breaker:

Think back to elementary school or middle school. Who was your best friend and how were the two of you best friends to the exclusions to all others? Would you have been described as inseparable? Why?

### Discussion:

<sup>15</sup> Didn't the Lord make you one with your wife? In body and spirit you are his. And what does he want? Godly children from your union. So guard your heart; remain loyal to the wife of your youth.

<sup>16</sup> "For I hate divorce!" says the Lord, the God of Israel. "To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. "So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife." —Malachi 2:15, 16

<sup>3</sup> Some Pharisees came and tried to trap him with this question: "Should a man be allowed to divorce his wife for just any reason?" <sup>4</sup> "Haven't you read the Scriptures?" Jesus replied. "They record that from the beginning 'God made them male and female.' <sup>5</sup> And he said, 'This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.' <sup>6</sup> Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together." —Matthew 19:3—6

- How well do these verses describe accepted practice in our culture today?
- What do you think is the most difficult about living out these verses in our culture?
- What entity in society could you look to that would help you if your marriage castle was under attack?
- Is there any part of these verses that ensures some security for the marriage castle and the couple within?
- God is nothing if not consistent in his love. How is God saying he hates divorce consistent with that love? (Note here that God does not say he hates divorced people.)
- How does God's unconditional love and faithfulness apply to the three promises couples make on their wedding day?
  - To stay married throughout your lives
  - To love and care for one another
  - To stay pure to one another – emotionally, physically, mentally
- What role does forgiveness play in living out a marriage the way it is described in the above verses?
- We like to think of love as a fuzzy warm thing surrounded by red hearts and little floating cupids. But, love, as it is defined by Elizabeth Elliot, "is to will another person's good." How is the forgiveness displayed in Christ's sacrifice of His life so key to us being able to live out the kind of intentional commitment reflected in this kind of love? How is this closer to the kind of unconditional love God has for us?

### On the Journey . . .

Take time this week to reflect on your marriage. Are there any areas in which you are not fully joined to your spouse? Pray that you will recognize these areas and that God will guide you in putting appropriate boundaries in place that will allow you to fully follow His plan for you.

If you are not married, what would you anticipate would be the most difficult area or areas in becoming one with your spouse? Take time this week to pray. Ask God to help you identify these areas open your heart and help you grow in a way that will make you ready to follow his plan for you.

# One

## February 24, 2008

The fourth wall of the castle becomes the one we put in place when we become “one flesh” with our spouse.

<sup>23</sup> “At last?” the man exclaimed. “This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called ‘woman,’ because she was taken from ‘man.’” <sup>24</sup> this explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one. <sup>25</sup> Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame. —Genesis 2:23-25

### Ice Breaker:

We all heard it somewhere! From our older siblings, on the playground, late night TV when our parents were out, maybe even our parents or from our family church. How did you first hear about “the birds and the bees” and how closely did what you heard resemble God’s plan?

### Discussion:

<sup>20</sup> And then he added, “It is what comes from inside that defiles you. <sup>21</sup> For from within, out of a person’s heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, <sup>22</sup> adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. <sup>23</sup> All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you.” —Mark 7:20-23

- Why do you think that talking about God’s plan for us sexually is such a difficult topic?
- Think back over the weeks of this series. First God asks us to leave our parents, then through public commitment, join with our spouse and after all of that His plan is for us to become one. Why is building the walls of our castle using God’s plan for relationship so critical to this last part of our marriage commitment being successful?
- Culturally what causes static in the oneness God wants us to create with our spouse?
- How is the oneness God wants for us a three part whole?
- What is the effect on oneness when one of the three parts is missing? What about if we try to fit in extra parts?
- What does the kind of purity God want for us look like for a single individual? What about for a married couple?

### On the Journey . . .

Take time over this next week to have an intentional conversation about this part of God’s plan for you. For those who are married, reflect on God’s plan for this part of your lives and reflect on how this may look different than the path you are currently on. What things would you want to change to have common unity with God and your spouse and in what things do you feel you have community unity?

For those who are unmarried, spend some time in prayer or with another Christ follower with whom you have some accountability. What boundaries do you want to have in place going forward from this day so that you can practice this part of God’s plan for your life?

# Welcome to the Alien Planet

## March 2, 2008

What do you do when you wake up and find out your Prince Charming is E.T.?

### Ice Breaker:

We've all seen the movies or cartoons where things or people are not who they appear. What is your favorite movie or story where a character is not what he or she appears?

### Discussion:

- Two very different people trying to live under one roof is the stuff of which sitcoms are made. If you are married, what were your expectations of what life would be like and how were they different from what you actually experienced to be reality?
- Why do you think that our culture persuades us to go along with the idea that we will find and marry Prince Charming/ Cinderella and that life together will be a fairy tale? Even worse why do we buy into the notion perpetuated by TV and advertisements that shortly after the wedding it all goes downhill and all we can expect from our marriages is marginal satisfaction at best?

*<sup>21</sup> And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. <sup>22</sup> For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church. <sup>24</sup> As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything. <sup>25</sup> For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her <sup>26</sup> to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. <sup>27</sup> he did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault. <sup>28</sup> In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself. <sup>29</sup> No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it, just as Christ cares for the church. <sup>30</sup> And we are members of His body. <sup>31</sup> As the Scriptures say, "A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are unite to one." <sup>32</sup> this is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one. <sup>33</sup> So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*

– Ephesians 5:21-33

- Looking over the past series, what is it overall that God wants for us in our marriages?
- Looking at this passage from Ephesians, how much preparation would you say that you had for marriage the way God sees it?
- How appealing is God's plan in light of the alternative plans offered by our culture?

We've tackled some difficult misunderstandings over the course of this series. We've redefined the word "helper" to be synonymous with God, referring to Himself as Helper to mankind instead of the notions of subservience our culture imposes. This week we are faced with the notion that to submit is an act of will and love. Our culture would have us believe that to submit is to be weak, when in fact, Christ Himself, all powerful God, practiced selfless submission as the ultimate act of love in submitting his life on the cross.

- How does understanding the idea of submitting to one another as a powerful act of love and care change your perspective on what God is instructing for marriage?
- How do we support one another in creating the kind life inside the castle God wants for us?
- How can practicing respect through mutual submission help strengthen the castle walls of marriage in the face of a continual onslaught of attacks by popular culture?

### On the Journey:

For those who are married, take an opportunity this week to try to reframe your perspective. Are there places where you are expecting your spouse to be something or someone he or she isn't? Are you able to practice the kind of loving relationship God describes in His love letter? Is the respect God wants a living thriving part of the relationship? Pray this week and ask God to change your heart so that you may see your spouse as a unique gift. Pray that God will help you see the beauty in those around you especially your spouse so that you may continually improve how you live out His plan for you.

For those who are unmarried, what do you think your expectations in a spouse are? Take time this week to examine your assumptions about what role your spouse would play in a marriage. Would you be able to see that person as a gift from God, shortcomings and all? Pray that your heart would be open to loving all in the way that God does so that your heart will be open to whatever gifts God chooses to give you in the form of those individuals around you and in those individuals who you may not yet have met. Pray that God will grow in you a respect that only He is capable of.