

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 Sunday Worship Gatherings at 9:15am or 11:00am. Questions?...Email connect@threadschurch.org or call the office at 269.327.0445.



Reputation: the estimation in which a person or thing is held, esp. by the community or the public generally. refers to the position one occupies or the standing that one has in the opinion of others, in respect to attainments, integrity, and the like. *Syn--* fame, renown, esteem, honor, recognition

Identity: the condition of being oneself or itself, and not another *Syn--* individuality, personality, distinctiveness, uniqueness

Week 1

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. —Philippians 2:5-8

Ice Breaker

Think back to when you were a kid. What value did you place on reputation?

Read Matthew 1:18-25.

Joseph did all the things that made him a “good man” in the eyes of his Jewish culture, but in order to embrace the identity God had planned for him, he had to respond to God in a whole new way.

- Looking back over your journey, how would you say that your response to God has changed?
- How comfortable or uncomfortable was the change?

Essentially Joseph had to trade in his reputation as a “good man” or tsadiq for his true identity as a good man.

- What do you think would be the most difficult part about giving more weight to what God thinks of him than what he thinks of himself?
- What do you find to be the most difficult about placing Who God thinks we are ahead of who our co-workers, neighbors or friends think we are?

Take a moment to reflect on what your reputation is in the eyes of others.

- Along your journey, what has changed about your reputation in order for you to begin finding your identity in Christ?
- Of your perceived reputation, what has been or will be the most difficult to let go of?
- Why is finding our identity in our reputations so precarious for our spiritual growth?

On the Journey. . .

- So, what is next on your Journey? We've seen how Joseph had to give up his reputation and become unworthy in the eyes of his culture in order to fulfill the identity God had created for him. Over the next week think about how you interact with your culture. What is your reputation in culture's eyes? How about your own? For your next step on the journey, commit to taking time this week pray. Ask God to grow in your heart a desire to give what He thinks of you a priority. As a part of this, identify a piece of what you perceive your reputation to be that will have to change in order for you to more fully follow Christ.
- For families with children, you may use the "Refrigerator Door" element at the back of the Soul Shaper to include your kids on your Journey this week.

Week 2

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. —Philippians 2:5-8

Our culture places a great deal of stock in reputation. We give attention and create a reputation for those "beautiful" people who choose to live in the public eye. Plain ordinary people seldom find themselves held in public esteem for more than a few moments, and when they do, one unpopular move sends them rocketing off the public radar screen to be replaced with someone more popular in the public's view.

Ice Breaker

What is our identity? Take a few moments at the beginning of your community group, or a few moments as a family or group of friends to try this exercise. You could even do this as people arrive and mingle for a bit before you begin your discussion time together. Tape a piece of paper or a post-it note to one another's backs. Then, take a few moments to write on one another's backs single words or short phrases that contribute to the individual's identity. Gather the group for discussion and allow time for one another to read the words and phrases from their backs.

- What was your initial gut response to the idea that others would be writing things about you that you could not affect?
- What were your thoughts as you read the words on the paper following the exercise?

- Now, here's the really tough part, the heart check. How much concern did you have over what the others in your group or family would say about who you were? Did the exercise make you apprehensive? Defensive?
- How do you suppose God would respond to the feelings you just experienced based on His love for you?
- What weight were you able to put on God's estimation of who you are in His eyes during this exercise with the others around you?

Read Isaiah 53:1-5

In making the choices that Mary and Joseph made, they had to place more importance on their identity in God's eyes than in the eyes of their neighbors or even their families, especially in the very public moments of their lives. Their identity in obedience to God did not protect them from stares in the market place or looks of disgust on the streets.

- Look carefully at verses 1-4 in the passage from Isaiah. Why do you suppose God chose Mary and Joseph to parent the Messiah?
- God's own reputation is marred by his choice in Mary and Joseph. What does this tell us about the stock we put in our own reputations?

God really turned things on their head when He came to us in the form of His humble Son, a man who then died a criminal's death on the cross. It is more than a little ironic that this action turned the public esteem of individuals' reputations on its head. The man most unlike the esteemed religious Jews become the most esteemed man in the eyes of God.

- Where do we find security in a God who would challenge us in a way that might very well make us an outcast among our peers?
- How might relying on Christ for your identity affect your reputation? What is your emotional response to that?
- What shift in heart might need to take place in order for you to find solace in a reputation defying identity with a God many people in our culture only think they know and in many cases, dismiss?

On the Journey. . .

- Our reputation and the way others perceive us is something that is very hard to dismiss. Over this next week, reflect on the emotional responses you had to the ice breaker exercise we did this week. Spend time in prayer and worship especially as we approach the celebration of Jesus' birth. Identify one small step you can take to place your identity in Christ over some aspect of your reputation. Choose one relationship in which you can exercise this part of your identity.
- For families with children, you may use the "Refrigerator Door" element at the back of the Soul Shaper to include your kids on your Journey this week.

Week 3

As we celebrate the birth of Christ take time this week to immerse yourself in God's love for us as it is expressed in the covenant He had with Abraham. Choosing to receive our identity in God is choosing to accept a gift beyond measure. A gift chosen by Abraham, Mary, Joseph and Jesus before us. Will we choose to lose some of ourselves to accept the greatest gift ever given?

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. 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 12:1-3

"I, yes I, am the one who comforts you. So why are you afraid of mere humans, who wither like the grass and disappear? Yet you have forgotten the LORD, your Creator the one who stretched out the sky like a canopy and laid the foundations of the earth. Will you remain in constant dread of human oppressors? Will you continue to fear the anger of your enemies? Where is their fury and anger now? It is gone! Soon all you captives will be released! Imprisonment, starvation, and death will not be your fate! For I am the LORD your God, who stirs up the sea, causing its waves to roar. My name is the LORD of Heaven's Armies. And I have put my words in your mouth and hidden you safely in my hand. I stretched out^d the sky like a canopy and laid the foundations of the earth. I am the one who says to Israel, "You are my people!" –Isaiah 51: 12-16

The Magnificat: Mary's Song of Praise

*Mary responded,
"Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.
How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!
For he took notice of his lowly servant girl,
and from now on all generations will call me blessed.
For the Mighty One is holy,
and he has done great things for me.
He shows mercy from generation to generation
to all who fear him.
His mighty arm has done tremendous things!
He has scattered the proud and haughty ones.
He has brought down princes from their thrones
and exalted the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away with empty hands.
He has helped his servant Israel
and remembered to be merciful.
For he made this promise to our ancestors,
to Abraham and his children forever." –Luke 1:46-55*

Simeon's Prophecy

"Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!" –Luke 2:29-32