

# soul shaper

group leader's guide

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This guide is to be used in conjunction with *Soul Shaper: Becoming the Person God Wants You to Be* by Keith Drury (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2013).

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## about this guide

*Soul Shaper* by Keith Drury forms the basis of this four-week group study. Each session brims with inspiration and practical application of biblical truth. As you and your group members study *Soul Shaper*, you will discover that the disciplines recommended are intended to place you and your group in a strategic relationship with God. The result will be greater joy and holy living.



# disciplines of abstinence

week 1 • chapters 1–6

“The disciplines of abstinence . . . become a means of grace, a channel through which God can change us as we clear away the clutter that blocks the path to him” (*Soul Shaper*, p. 9).

## to the facilitator

Welcome everyone to this four-week study. Have each person introduce him- or herself. Assure the group that you want each session to provide opportunities for informal, nonthreatening sharing. The purpose of the study is twofold: to learn about the spiritual disciplines that can help us grow close to God, who is the ultimate soul shaper, and how to put those disciplines into practice.

## focus on God’s Word

When we meet someone for the first time and learn his or her name, one of the first questions we may ask is, “What do you do?” Perhaps the question reflects our connection with a busy world and our own busy lives. However, a busy schedule may be counterproductive to a spiritual life. Instead of being overly active, we need to practice fasting, silence, solitude, simplicity, rest, and secrecy.

### fasting

In *Soul Shaper*, author Keith Drury writes, “Fasting is abstaining from food for a time in order to gain mastery of the physical realm and open us up to the spiritual” (p. 11). Jesus told his disciples how to fast. Contrary to the ostentatious Pharisees’ way of fasting, followers of Jesus should not fast to *appear* spiritual. They should do whatever is necessary to keep their countenances looking fresh and healthy. Their fasting should be obvious not to others but to God (Matt. 6:16–18). In turn God will reward the fasting.

Jesus began his ministry and preceded his temptation in the desert by fasting (Matt. 4:1–2), and the Old Testament includes numerous references to fasting, notably Daniel’s fast for three weeks (Dan. 10:2–3). Acts 13:1–3 reports that the leaders of the church in Antioch were fasting and praying when the Lord led them to commission Barnabas and Paul for missionary service. Further, at the consecration of elders, Paul and Barnabas prayed and fasted (Acts 14:23).

## **silence**

In recommending silence as a discipline of abstinence, Keith Drury reminds us that when Elijah was alone and quiet in a cave on Mount Horeb, God spoke to him in a gentle whisper (1 Kings 19:8–13). On page 21 of *Soul Shaper*, Drury states, “We plan times of silence so we can better tune in to this quiet voice of God.” He suggests we talk less and “escape the tyranny of noise and recalibrate our souls in stillness” (p. 23). Drury asserts that “practicing the discipline of silence provides time for listening to God after reading Scripture or praying” (p. 23).

## **solitude**

Solitude is another discipline of abstinence. Jesus interrupted his busy ministry to go to a solitary place at daybreak (Luke 4:42). In *Soul Shaper*, Keith Drury suggests the following ways to begin this discipline: find a place to be alone, schedule a time, keep your expectations sensible, keep the focus on God, seek one important message from God, be aware of effect lag (give God time to work), seek moments of solitude in your day, and try longer periods of time (pp. 30–32). Drury describes the discipline of solitude as fasting from contact with people (p. 31).

## **simplicity**

Simplicity is another discipline of abstinence. It involves a simple lifestyle in which we free ourselves from the tyranny of things and rivet our heart’s attention on the spiritual (Matt. 6:19). Jesus set the prime example of the simple lifestyle (Matt. 8:20), and Hebrews exhorts us to keep our lives free from the love of money and be content with what we have. Why? “Because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’” (Heb. 13:5).

## **rest**

Rest is another discipline of abstinence. God rested after he created all things (Gen. 2:2), but many Christians are too busy to rest even one day a week. We should follow the example of rest Jesus set by inviting his disciples when he said, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest” (Mark 6:31).

## **secrecy**

Keith Drury cites secrecy as another discipline of abstinence. In *Soul Shaper*, he defines this discipline as “abstaining from taking credit for the good deeds we do” (p. 52). Jesus taught that, instead of seeking the praise of others, as hypocrites do, we should perform charitable and righteous deeds to honor God (Matt. 6:1–8, 16–18). In response, God will reward us. Drury offers ways to begin practicing secrecy. He suggests we should do the following: make a list of ideas for the practice of secrecy, create a reminder to practice secrecy, watch out for vainglory, abstain from wanting credit for our ideas, gracefully take recognition, and not report what God has been doing in our lives.

Many Bible scholars believe the apostle Paul wrote about his own experience of being caught up to the third heaven and receiving revelations there. However, Paul did not attract attention to

himself. He said simply, "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven" (2 Cor. 12:2). Keith Drury asks the pertinent question: "God's approval is more important to us than the praise of people, isn't it?" (*Soul Shaper*, p. 58).

### **focus on life**

Discuss the following with your group.

1. How would you define fasting?
2. Do you agree or disagree that fasting in the Christian life is optional?
3. How would you respond if a new believer asked you how often and for how long he or she should fast?
4. What reason do you think motivated Jesus to fast before he faced temptation in the desert?
5. What might you find most difficult if you fasted?
6. What tips for being silent and alone with God might you offer those who want to establish a regular quiet time with the Lord?
7. Why do you agree or disagree that a church's many activities may be counterproductive to soul shaping?
8. Why do you agree or disagree that a worn-out physical condition damages one's spiritual well-being?
9. How might Christians exhibit false humility?
10. How might vainglory be behind a person's testimony about what God revealed to him or her during personal Bible study?

### **wrap-up**

Ask each person to anonymously write down which discipline of abstinence he or she will practice this week.



# disciplines of action

week 2 • chapters 7–13

“The disciplines of action provide things we can do that open us up to God’s work” (*Soul Shaper*, p. 61).

## to the facilitator

This session features disciplines of action we can pursue that become a channel of divine grace. By taking the actions identified in this session, we open ourselves to God’s work of changing us into the people he wants us to be.

## focus on God’s Word

In *Soul Shaper*, Keith Drury identifies some disciplines of action as journaling, hospitality, confession, Scripture, charity, prayer, and penance. He points out that performing these disciplines does not make us holy but available to God for his work of changing us.

### journaling

Psalms 3–7 and 10–13 provide good examples of journaling. As we journal what God teaches us and does in our daily lives, we need to be consistent in our daily entries and periodic reviews. Our entries should be transparent. We need to be honest with God and ourselves, but we should keep our journaling private. We may journal our prayers as well as Scripture and its personal applications.

### hospitality

Hospitality is an unselfish action taken on behalf of others, sometimes strangers (Heb. 13:2). Mary and Martha were hospitable sisters who entertained Jesus (Luke 19:38–42). Paul instructed the believers at Rome to “practice hospitality” (Rom. 12:13). The apostle John told his readers to show hospitality to itinerant missionaries (3 John 8). Peter urged believers to “offer hospitality to one another without grumbling” (1 Pet. 4:9). Further, the early church and the spiritual leaders were expected to be hospitable toward widows (1 Tim. 3:2; 5:9–10; Titus 1:7–8). Keith Drury reflects on this: “The best hospitality makes strangers feel at home. It makes guests want to kick off their shoes and put on slippers” (*Soul Shaper*, p. 77).

## **confession**

Drury cites confession as a discipline of action. It is humbling to confess our sins to God and to one another, but it is good for us (James 5:16; 1 John 1:9). King David experienced the joy of forgiveness when he stopped covering up his sin with Bathsheba. He prayed, “When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. . . . Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.’ And you forgave the guilt of my sin” (Ps. 32:3, 5).

## **scripture**

The proper use of Scripture is another discipline of action. When we read, study, memorize, meditate upon, and obey God’s Word, we become better acquainted with God and develop a closer resemblance to his Son (see Ps. 1:1–3; 119:11; John 17:17; Col. 3:16; 2 Tim. 3:15–17; 1 Pet. 2:2).

## **charity**

The discipline of charity also helps to open us to God’s transforming work. Keith Drury calls charity “love in action” (*Soul Shaper*, p. 105). The apostle James advocated charity and wrote that it was proof of genuine religion and true faith (James 1:27; 2:14–18). The early church set the standard high by contributing to the needs of its poor members (see Acts 2:43–45; 2 Cor. 8:1–9; 9:1–5; Gal. 2:10).

## **prayer**

Prayer, as a discipline of action, draws us closer to God. Although the Bible is replete with exhortations to pray, none is more challenging than the one that commands us to “pray continually” (1 Thess. 5:17).

In *Soul Shaper*, Drury reminds us to include the following elements in our prayers: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication, and listening (pp. 120–123). Certainly the prayer Jesus taught his disciples (Luke 11:2–4) and his High Priestly Prayer (John 17) offer model prayers we can follow.

Of course we can pray any time, but it helps to set aside a portion of every day for prayer. The psalmist said, “Evening, morning and noon I cry out in my distress, and he hears my voice” (Ps. 55:17).

## **penance**

Drury also cites penance as a discipline of action. He defines it as “willfully embracing earthly punishment for wrongdoing that has already been forgiven by God” (*Soul Shaper*, p. 126). When we engage in penance, we right the wrongs we have committed against our fellow human beings. Zacchaeus illustrates two sides of penance (Luke 19:1–10). He promised to restore what he had wrongfully taken (restitution), and he also promised to give half his money to the poor (penance).

## **focus on life**

Discuss the following with your group.

1. Do you agree or disagree that journaling is a helpful tool in the Christian life? Why?
2. Why do you agree or disagree that Christian hospitality is a lost art?
3. What benefits have you gained from showing hospitality?
4. Have you ever opened your home to missionaries? If so, what benefits did you and/or your children experience?
5. Why should a Christian confess his or her sins to God?
6. Why do you agree or disagree that the quality of time spent reading and studying Scripture is more important than the quantity of time?
7. What do you think are the greatest hindrances to maintaining a schedule of daily devotions?
8. Who do you think qualifies as the poor Christians should help?
9. What do you think is the top reason to pray? Explain!
10. What answers to prayer have you received recently?
11. How has prayer helped you grow stronger in the Christian life?
12. Why do you agree or disagree with the inclusion of penance as a discipline of action?
13. What forms might penance take?

## **wrap-up**

Close with silent prayer. Instruct each group member to reflect on disciplines of action and commit to taking a specific action this week. In silent prayer, each person should ask God to enable him or her by his Spirit to fulfill the commitment.



# disciplines of relationships

week 3 • chapters 14–21

“In the disciplines of relationships, we practice the actions that make right our relationships with others” (*Soul Shaper*, p. 137).

## to the facilitator

This session focuses on interpersonal relations, so this is a good time to build stronger relationships in your group. Have the group members share in a general way what they appreciate about the other members of the group.

## focus on God’s Word

In *Soul Shaper*, Drury offers useful information for people to use to build strong, lasting, interpersonal relationships. The disciplines of relationships Drury focuses on are: restitution, forgiveness, capturing thoughts, restoration, humility, purifying ambition, honestly, and peacemaking.

### restitution

Restitution is the first essential action in building relationships. In *Soul Shaper*, Drury defines restitution as “going back and making things right for things you took or with people you hurt” (p. 141). This action is precisely what Jesus referred to when he instructed, “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift” (Matt. 5:23–24).

### forgiveness

Forgiveness is also a discipline of relationships. It should be based on the example God set by forgiving our sins (Col. 3:13). He forgave us completely (Ps. 103:12) and unconditionally (Eph. 1:7–8). Do we forgive our debtors as God has forgiven us?

### capturing thoughts

Another discipline of relationship is that of capturing thoughts. Jesus taught that lustful thoughts are just as sinful as the act of adultery (Matt. 5:27–29). Surrounded by lustful stimuli that emanate

from our fallen world, we need to discipline our minds to reject sinful thoughts and to accept righteous ones (Rom. 12:2). (On page 170 of *Soul Shaper*, Drury lists Scriptures that will help us perform this discipline.)

### **restoration**

Restoration, too, is a discipline of relationships. Any believer is capable of getting tripped up by a sin, but when it happens, we should endeavor to restore that person (Gal. 6:1). Instead of throwing stones, we should throw out a lifeline. Sin is not trivial; it is terrible; so when we practice restoration, we must not excuse the sin but rather follow Jesus' example. He told an adulterous woman, "Neither do I condemn you. . . . Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:11). In our efforts to restore fallen believers, we must not assume holier-than-thou attitudes, but rather proceed with vigilance or we, too, may be tempted (Gal. 6:2).

### **humility**

Humility is an essential trait in the disciplines of relationship. The apostle Peter learned the hard way that "pride goes before destruction" (Prov. 16:18). He boasted that he would never forsake the Lord but later denied him three times (Matt. 26:69–74). After the Lord restored him, Peter quoted Proverbs 3:34: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5). He had learned his lesson. Have we?

### **purifying ambition**

If we would draw near to God and become pliable in his hands, we need to purify our ambition. Jesus taught us that servitude is greatness in his kingdom. His disciples argued over who would have prominent positions in his kingdom, and James and John asked Jesus for the chief seats of power. They requested, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." In correcting their impure ambition, Jesus pointed out that "even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:37, 45).

Impure pride drives many unbelievers to be noticed and to gain control over others. It even drives some believers the same way, but the apostle John said such evil lusting "comes not from the Father but from the world." He added, "The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:16–17). Shall we allow impure ambition to control us, or shall we purify our ambition so it will be holy and eternally productive?

### **honesty and peacemaking**

Honesty and peacemaking are the final disciplines of relationships that Keith Drury addresses in *Soul Shaper*. Hypocrisy and overt lying are common in today's business and politics and are becoming increasingly common in our churches. But we are commanded in Romans 12:17 to "provide things honest in the sight of all men" (KJV).

Honesty and peacemaking work together. If someone offends us, we should be honest and let that person know he or she offended us and we want to restore peaceful relations. James 3:18

encourages peacemaking by promising, “Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.” Perhaps, we can be peacemakers by reconciling bickering church members. In Philippians 4:2–3 Paul urged Euodia and Syntyche to rise above their differences and “be of the same mind in the Lord.” And then he called upon another believer to help bring about the reconciliation.

### **focus on life**

Discuss the following with your group.

1. What acts of restitution have you witnessed?
2. Do you agree or disagree that Christians should forgive and forget?
3. How is it possible to forget a personal offense?
4. Should we forgive those who have not asked for forgiveness? Why or why not?
5. Do you agree that lustful thoughts are as evil as lustful acts? Why?
6. Why do you agree or disagree that sexual fantasies are addictive?
7. How important is the Christian’s mind in holiness? Defend your answer.
8. What steps might a divided church take to restore unity?
9. What examples of genuine humility have you found in the Bible?
10. What differences, if any, do you see between humility and self-deprecation?
11. Is every form of ambition sinful? Why or why not?
12. What evidence of impure ambition have you observed or read about?
13. How are honesty and peacemaking related?

### **wrap-up**

Write *forgive* on something everyone will see. Ask group members to suggest elements of forgiveness that begin with the letters in the word forming an acrostic. Conclude by challenging everyone to take specific actions this week to improve their interpersonal relationships.



# discipline of response

week 4 • chapter 22

“The spiritual discipline of response is managing our reactions to what life brings us—both good and bad” (*Soul Shaper*, p. 241).

## to the facilitator

This session concludes the study of *Soul Shaper* by motivating us to respond appropriately to all the disciplines we studied. Tell your group that we can either react to circumstances that come our way or we can respond to them—and there is a difference. This session will help us respond wisely rather than simply react emotionally.

## focus on God’s Word

What should we do when difficult circumstances mount up in our lives and we cannot change them? The apostle James counseled us, “Consider it pure joy . . . whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2–4). As James noted, trials come in a variety of forms. In *Soul Shaper*, Keith Drury mentions “opposition, suffering, pain, temptation, divorce, enemies, defeat, persecution, the death of a loved one, and even our own impending deaths” (p. 241). The disciplines we have studied fortify us to respond to these trials, but Drury points out that “responding is a discipline in itself” (p. 241).

Job responded to adversity appropriately. In spite of being bombarded with heavy trials, he retained his faith in God. Even when his wife advised him to curse God and die, he exclaimed, “You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” (Job 2:10).

Although it is easy to react negatively to trouble and hard to respond positively to it, we can see God’s hand in our trials and therefore respond positively. Suffering, pain, calamity, and trials are included in the “all things” God uses “for the good of those who love him” (Rom. 8:28). These things test our faith with the intention of validating it. So instead of chafing under the stress of trouble, we can “give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thess. 5:18).

Sometimes trouble arises from those who oppose us. Even then, we can respond positively. The Old Testament story of Joseph is a great example of this. Joseph’s brothers hated him and sold him into slavery. In Egypt, Joseph was falsely accused of rape and put him in prison. In spite of being the object of severe hatred, pain, false accusation, and imprisonment, Joseph did not react with

resentment or self-pity. Instead, he responded with submission to God, believing God would fulfill his will for him (Gen. 37:5–9).

Eventually Joseph was released from prison and was made the pharaoh’s governor of Egypt. When famine struck, Joseph’s brothers traveled to request food, but they did not recognize Joseph until he revealed his identity. Again, Joseph responded to what the brothers had done to him by recognizing God’s hand in all the circumstances. He told them, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Gen. 50:20).

One of life’s hardest trial is the death of a loved one or our own death. How we handle the death of a loved one or our own impending death can be either negative or positive. We can respond positively, knowing that Jesus shares our grief when a loved one dies. He wept outside the tomb of his friend Lazarus, and he assures us he is “the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). At his return, all Christians—dead and alive—will experience a joyful reunion (1 Thess. 4:16–17). Therefore, we should not react to death by grieving hopelessly but by responding eagerly with anticipation of Jesus’ return and by encouraging one another.

In *Soul Shaper*, Drury offers wise counsel: “Without facing death, we never know for certain the surety of our faith. It is up to us. Facing death is the final exam of faith. The Christian response to death is to recognize that it has no permanent sting—for we have eternal life” (p. 247).

### **focus on life**

Discuss the following with your group.

1. Why do you think God allows trials to enter our lives?
2. How is it possible to respond joyfully to suffering?
3. Why do you agree or disagree that suffering usually makes Christians more like Jesus?
4. Is it all right to get angry when you or a loved one suffers? Defend your answer.
5. How would you answer someone who claims sickness is always punishment for sin in one’s life?
6. Read Job 1:1. Why do you agree or disagree that bad things happen to good people?
7. What kind of response to a personal enemy might resolve conflict?
8. How can a believer handle rejection in the best way?
9. How should a believer respond to abuse he or she experienced as a child? Are forgiveness and reconciliation possible? If so, how?
10. What do you think is the best answer to, “Why me, Lord?”
11. How did Jesus take the sting out of death?
12. How does the hope of Jesus’ return alleviate grief?

### **wrap-up**

volunteers share what takeaways they have received from this four-week study. Close this last session by having the group read or sing “Because He Lives.”