



## **SHAPE Course Guide for Life Group Leaders or individuals Jan/ Feb 2025**

*We suggest that you send the material out to your group in advance, so that they have the material they need week by week and can catch up if they miss a session. (If there is more material here than you need, encourage people to reflect during the week on anything that got left out.)*

### **Introduction to the series:**

*(You can skip this if everyone has read it prior to the session.)*

When someone asks, “What shape are you?” we probably think about our clothes size or what we see in the mirror. But we have a spiritual “shape” too, made up of everything that makes us the people we are: our genes, our upbringing, our life-experiences, our gifts and abilities. What sort of person has God made you?

**Your SHAPE for God’s Service** will help us to discover the unique *shape* of person that we have become, the gifts God has given us and how he might want to use us. It may confirm things we already know or have half expected. On the other hand, it may challenge or even change the way we see ourselves.

As a result, God’s kingdom may be built up as each person finds the ministry to which God is calling them in the Church and in the world. We want God’s will to be done on earth, as we pray in the Lord’s Prayer. As we find our role in this, it will enable each of us to live and serve with more joy, satisfaction and fruitfulness, living out our unique calling within the church and on our frontlines.

The acronym S.H.A.P.E. stands for:

- S- Spiritual Gifts**
- H- Heart’s desire**
- A-abilities**
- P-personality**
- E-experience**

Through Scripture we will consider each of these factors that make up our “shape,” discerning our unique calling as whole life disciples who make disciples. For some, this may be a new experience, discovering God’s call on their own life. Others may have a high degree of self-knowledge in some or all of these areas, but as life goes on, it’s good

to take stock of where we are now and to seek God's guidance to discern where he is calling us to in the current season.

It's a journey we can go on together, as we are joined together as one body, the church. When individuals grow and are released into mission, everybody is blessed.

The more you engage with the series, the more you will get out of it. Use the handouts to explore the ideas in more depth and apply them to your own situation.

**Summary: The aim of S.H.A.P.E. is to help us discover our spiritual "shape" and release us all into the life God created us for.**

**Resources:**

The original course came from Rick Warren's work on the **Purpose Driven Life**, and has been adapted by others across the world.



## **Week 1 beginning 5 Jan: Mission Possible - Ready for God's call**

Suggested song for opening worship: I, the Lord of sea and sky

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to live the life God has created for you. No one else has the same mission as you, it's as unique as you are.

*Opening questions:*

1. What sort of people do you think receive a calling from God? Is this different from having a job or being good at something?
2. Would you say you have a calling in life? If yes, what is that calling? *(Jot down your answers to this if you have any. Keep it to yourself until later. Don't worry if you don't have an answer.)*

*Bible wisdom: the calling we all share*

3. Read Matt 22:36-40 (known as the Greatest Commandment) and Matt 28:18-20 (known as the Great Commission.)
4. What do you think God has called everyone to BE?  
What do you think God has called everyone to DO?

*Apply to our church community: the calling we work out together*

5. What is a disciple? How can we help one another in our church community to grow as disciples? What opportunities are provided, and what do we need to put in ourselves?
6. At Christ Church we sometimes use the phrase "whole life disciples." Why do you think we have added the words "whole life"? What does it mean and how does it help us live out the Great Commission?

*Apply to yourself: the calling that is unique to you*

Now read Ephesians 2:9-10

7. How does it help your **self-image** and your **sense of purpose** in life, to know that you are God's handiwork and that he has a job for you to do? Think how we value handcrafted items highly.

Look at your answer to Q.2 if you had one. Has your answer changed or been confirmed?

Spend time in silent prayer to reflect on the ideas and emotions raised in the session. Someone could read Psalm 139: 1-6 slowly and leave a time of silence for reflection after each verse.

There is optional follow up work for individuals on the handout below.

## Week 2: beginning 12<sup>th</sup> Jan Spiritual Gifts



### **S- Spiritual Gifts**

**H- Heart's desire**

**A-abilities**

**P-personality**

**E-experience**

### **Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 and 27-31**

Preparation:

Complete the questionnaire in Handout 2 before the session and bring it with you.

Suggested song for opening worship: *Love divine, all loves excelling*

*Introduction:*

The subject of spiritual gifts can be confusing, but Paul, for one, does “not want you to be uninformed.” (1 Cor 12:1) We want to understand them and use them well for God’s glory.

There are a range of spiritual gifts, with Paul giving different lists in 1 Cor 12:7-11, 27-31 Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Peter 4:10-11. Some are for the building up of the church through a demonstration of God’s power and effective teaching and leading. Others can build up an individual’s faith. Some need collaboration, for example when someone prays in tongues, and another interprets. All the gifts can fuel mission as the Spirit leads the agenda, guides teaching and planning, opens the Scriptures and enables God’s power to be displayed among Christians and non-believers alike.

*Opening Questions: gifts from the Spirit*

1.Can you think of a time when you saw the power of the Holy Spirit in a way that made it clear God was at work, rather than human skill? What about the situation made it seem that God was at work?

2.Why do you think Paul “does not want you to be uninformed” about spiritual gifts? Why do you think they are not talked about or used much in some parts of the world Church today?

*Bible wisdom: diversity and unity*

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 and 27-31. (*Or read the whole chapter if you have time.*)

Paul wants his readers, the church community in Corinth, to balance its diversity and its unity in Christ.

3. Find words and phrases that emphasise the **variety** of gifts within the community. Then find words and phrases that stress the **unity** Paul wants the church to have.

4. Why might it be hard for a church community to balance variety and unity when it comes to exercising spiritual gifts?

*Apply to our church community: Power and love*

5. Which spiritual gifts listed in 1 Cor 12:8-11 and 1 Cor 12:28 have you seen at work in our church community? What impact do they have?

6. Choose one gift you would like to see exercised more in our church community and say why.

7. Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 (or on to v12 if you have time.) How can gifts be used lovingly?

*Apply to yourself:*

7. What spiritual gift would you like to ask God for? What impact do you pray it might have?

*Follow up: (optional)*

Look at and pray over the questionnaire you completed. Share it with a trusted friend or prayer partner and write in your journal what you sense God is saying to you.

## Week 3:beginning 19<sup>th</sup> Jan Heart's Desire

**S- Spiritual Gifts**

**H- Heart's desire**

**A-abilities**

**P-personality**

**E-experience**



### **Scripture: 1 Samuel 17:26 -49 and Psalm 101**

Suggested song for opening worship: *Take my life and let it be*

In the Bible we find many characters who reveal their passions by their actions, good and bad, from Ruth's devotion to her mother-in-law to Mary's passion to be obedient to God.

What is your heart's desire at this time, and how might God be able to use it for his glory?

*Opening Questions: what moves you?*

- 1.If you had to give up doing something due to illness or other circumstances, what would you find it hardest to give up?
2. What news items or current issues get you the most excited/ angry/ sorrowful?

*Bible wisdom: God-given passion*

Read 1 Samuel 17:26-49

- 3.What was it that made David so determined to fight Goliath? Why do you think he felt so confident he would win?
- 4.What other events or actions from David's life also reveal what his heart's desire was?

*Apply to our church community: clues to where our heart lies*

5. David had a passion that God's name would be honoured within Israel and among its neighbours. What do you think is our heart's desire for the community we serve in Downend? What clues might reveal it? Does our heart's desire as a church seem to fit well with the Greatest commandment and Great Commission as looked at in Week 1? (Matt 22:37-40 and Matt 28:16-20)
- 6.Does the way we use our resources (Where we invest our money, our energy, our prayer, our time) reflect our heart's desire as a church? What other forces compete with this?

*Apply to yourself:*

7. Does the way you use your resources (money, energy, prayer, time) reflect your heart's desire? Is there anything God is calling you to do differently?

8. What passion do you have outside of church life, that you might pursue for God's glory? Ask the others to pray for you.

*Follow up:*

Complete Handout 3



## Week 4 beginning 26<sup>th</sup> Jan Abilities



**S- Spiritual Gifts**

**H- Heart's desire**

**A-abilities**

**P-personality**

**E-experience**

**Scripture: Exodus 31:1-11 and Ephesians 3:7-11**

Suggested song for opening worship: *Before you I kneel, my Master and Maker.*

Most of us have a tendency to downplay our abilities without giving glory to the God who has gifted us. Some of us have never been encouraged to recognise any gifts in ourselves, but maybe now is the time to recognise abilities we previously overlooked, hid deliberately through fear, or failed to appreciate. Our modesty or lack of confidence can become a spiritual issue if we refuse to trust that God created us as we are and chose to give us the particular natural abilities we have. Especially if we keep comparing ourselves to others who have different gifts.

Imagine if everyone used their gifts to their full potential, both within the church and on our frontlines, all for God's glory!

*Opening Questions: good for nothing?*

1. Why do most people (in the UK especially?) find it hard to name and celebrate their own abilities? How far is this attitude helpful/ unhelpful for followers of Christ?

2. Which gifts/ abilities does our society value most? Which gifts/ abilities do you think God values most?

*Bible wisdom: chosen and equipped*

Read Exodus 31:1-10

3. How were Bezalel and Oholiab and the skilled workers gifted for the task God gave them? (Note that while two were given a special named role, there were many others who played their part.)

Read Ephesians 3:7-9

3. What does Paul believe he has been given the ability to do through God's grace? How far are you confident that God has also given us the ability to continue this work?

*Apply to our church community: God's equipping for God's glory*

5. Each write down something that the person on your left is good at. Read them out with the statement, (Name) I thank God that he has given you the gift of .....

How did you feel?

6. What abilities do you think are most needed in our church community right now for our gathered or scattered ministry? Are any of them dormant/ undiscovered/ missing/ suppressed from within or from outside/ excluded? Pray together for new gifts to rise up and existing gifts to be given space to flourish for God's glory.

*Apply to yourself:*

7. Spend some time praying together over the phrase, "God's equipping for God's mission"

Which gifts do you/ is God prompting you to exercise within the church's community and mission? Which gifts do you/ is God prompting you to exercise on your frontlines?

Follow up:

Complete Handout 4

## Week 5 beginning 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb: Personality

**S- Spiritual Gifts**

**H- Heart's desire**

**A-abilities**

**P-personality**

**E-experience**



### **Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12: 12-20, 27 and Galatians 5:13- 26**

Understanding our own personality better helps us to appreciate the unique person God created.

Allowing our characters to be forged through the experiences of life and through God's Spirit helps us to become more like Christ, whatever the strengths and weaknesses of our personalities.

Suggested song for opening worship: *Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me* or *Good Good Father*

*Opening questions:*

1. In your group, who likes to get started on time? Who likes to make sure all the material is covered? Who likes to bring in new ideas that others have not considered? Who likes to ask challenging questions? Who likes to go off and research things afterwards? Who makes everyone feel included and at home? (You might well have a fair idea of your different personalities and how you work together!)

2. If any of you have done any personality tests in the past, share how you found the experience and how it was helpful or not. What is the difference between personality and character?

*Bible wisdom: imitating Christ together*

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-20,27

1. What is your response to Paul's way of describing the body of Christ here?

Read Galatians 5:13- 26

2. What advice can you find in this passage to help your character become more like Jesus' character?

*Apply to our church community: all sorts*

5.What are the pros and cons of having a wide range of personalities in the church community? Without getting personal in a negative way, can you think of examples?

6.Thank God in prayer together for the different personalities in your group, and in the church. Pray that we will all continue to development of Christ-like characters.

*Apply to yourself: under pressure*

7.What personality traits of yours come out when you are under stress? What character traits would you like to build in order to remain faithful and fruitful when under pressure?

8. Which of the fruits of the Spirit would you most like to ask God for? Do so.

*Follow up:*

Complete Handout 5

Or why not search online for personality test such as the Enneagram, Myers Briggs etc.

## Week 6 beginning 9<sup>th</sup> Feb Experience

**S- Spiritual Gifts**

**H- Heart's desire**

**A-abilities**

**P-personality**

**E-experience**



**Scripture: Romans 5:1-11 and Romans 8:28**

*Suggested song for opening worship: The power of your love or Faithful One*

*Opening questions: life changes*

1. Someone in the group volunteer to describe an experience that was life changing for them. Can they see any ways that God has used the experience to bring something positive for themselves or for others?

*Bible wisdom: all things for good?*

Read Romans 5:1-11

2. Why does Paul say we can glory in our sufferings? What is your response to his claims?

3. Using this passage, and also Romans 8:28, how do you think God views our experiences of life, good and bad? What does he want us to do with them?

*Apply to our church community: passing on the baton*

4. If you were to give one piece of advice to a younger Christian in the church, what would it be?

5. What common experiences have you been through as a group, or as the church family, that have shaped the community? Where have you seen God's hand at work in this? (You might include COVID and the lockdowns in this discussion.)

*Apply to yourself:*

6. What past experiences help to give you confidence in following God and carrying out your particular ministry?

7. What past experiences tend to hold you back from following your calling? Talk to God about this and pray.

*Follow up:*

Consider prayer ministry or counselling if you feel that past experiences are significantly affecting your walk with Christ.

Complete Handout 6 to reflect on all that you have learnt in the SHAPE course.