

Becoming An Expert By Experience

This exercise is the final of five in the S.H.A.P.E. series. Until now we have been dealing with the things God has given us, trying to discover the unique Spiritual gifts, Heart, Abilities, and Personality God instilled in us before we were born. This final exercise is entirely different in that it deals with all the things you have learned from birth. Every human being has a natural urge to experience the world and discover his or her place as a unique individual. They have the desire to take advantage of all the happiness that may be offered and avoid painful suffering. Being a Christian means following God's way, instead of your own way. Most Christians would agree with this, although still ask the question "What is it God wants for me?"

The best way to find our unique S.H.A.P.E. is by trial and error; we learn best how to do something, and discover if we enjoy doing it by experiencing it firsthand. By far the most important thing a Christian ought to experience is the joy of relationship with Jesus Christ. In order that we may take advantage of all that God has planned for us, we are invited to follow Jesus. In doing this we will be changed from the inside out, into more loving, gentle, patient, peaceful, effective, and truthful people. Following Christ is a personal journey with many forks in the roads we travel with more than one commendable alternative to choose from.

This exercise

To know God as Christ knew God we must experience life by the guidance of God's Spirit within us. Listening to God's leading is not an easy task. Our perceptions of the world may be clouded by our past experiences, and our present environment. The further the world takes us from God's way, the more distant we become to God's voice within us. The world is filled with people who have experienced harmful environments and perpetuate this vicious cycle by teaching what they have learned. On the other hand, God continues to work through unhealthy people to achieve perfect unity in diversity. We all have the ability to search out our inner Spirit, in light of less than perfect surroundings. None of us are perfect, or perfectly in tune with God's direction for us, but we all have the power to effect change in ourselves and in the world that we live in.

Our church is the place we may look to envision a better future. We come to church to understand all that God has to offer, to grow as individuals, and unite as one body. We seek a sense of belonging and a place of hope, to band together as a family, helping each other grow closer to God and preparing each other to support the world and its needs. We work together to do as Christ would do, moving from knowledge to action. We experience in a transforming fashion what Christ has called us to experience, allowing the word of God to be written on our hearts and imprinted in our minds. Together, we become Holy beings volunteering our time and resources assisting others to see the world and its people as Christ sees them, until death, where we have no choice but to part.

B: Experiencing Connection:

God has written that we should live a life of love. Relationships are the means by which we share God’s love. We are to give out the love we have received from God to others. We are all members of God’s family. God has said a Christian without a church family is like a child without a birth family. Each member has a unique role and special gifts and abilities to aid their part within the congregation and outside in the world. The unity we may experience within the diversity of our church family “provides us with a purpose to live for, people to live with, principles to live by, a profession to live out, and power to live on.” (Rick Warren – The Purpose Driven Life). The greater the commitment we can give the deeper the relationships we will have. The relationships we experience outside in the world are built upon the platform that our church family provides. We are strengthened in our convictions when we extend our fellowship, with people who are lacking in faith, hope and love.

Relationship Experience:

Once we have a true sense of independence, we can share ourselves with others by understanding them, respecting them, keeping commitments to them, communicating with them, and living righteously before them. We can encourage them by helping them feel safe, worthy, and loved. We can do this by seeking mutual benefit in all our interactions, maintaining a personal balance between courage and consideration, when trying to reach agreements. Are there any relationships you have experienced that have been more give than take? Another way to aid effective relations with others is by really listening to them. We all want to be understood, but often neglect to understand what others are really saying to us. Are there people in your life you have ignored, pretended with, or selectively listened to? Have you ever made a list of people that you get along with and others you don’t? Are there similarities between the people in each group? Have you experienced trouble in group-work or as part of a team? Considering the questions above, write down anything you need to work on as a partner or as a member of a team. Then write down what makes you a good partner and team member.

D: Experiencing Suffering:

It is not about how far we have come in the world compared to other people; it is about how far we have come compared to what we have been given and what we have endured. God loves each one of us and uses our experiences to help us grow closer to Him. What God really looks at is the attitude of your heart. God does not desire you to experience pain and suffering. God has allowed us free will and over time we have used and abused this gift of sovereignty. It is from the poor choices people have made in the past that we suffer today. However, praise our God who comforts us in times of adversity. It is written we are to comfort others as God has comforted us (2 Corinthians 1:4).

“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverent submission. Although He was a son, He learned obedience from what He suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him.” (Hebrews 4:8 NIV)

Painful Experience:

The infliction of pain is a two-way street. We have once been inflicted, but now we are the deliverers. Have you been hurt in the past by someone who loves you, or by someone who could have cared less about you? It is a hard thing to accept that our transgressors were also at one time the victims. However, that does not take away the pain or the significance of the suffering we are experiencing today. It is important for us to realize we are truly good at heart, we are worthy of all the awesome things God has to offer us, and we deserve to feel better and live more fulfilling lives. It is very important that we look deeply into our pain and free ourselves from it. In some cases it takes the intervention of another for us to be able to bare our grief and seek healing. Have you surrendered your pain to Christ, or do you have many devices to block your pain? In grieving we admit the truth of our suffering, in recovery we forgive those who have wounded us. Write down anything that you wish. If you have suffered great losses or seemingly unforgivable torture, you may wish to hold back your voice until you can talk to someone you trust, who knows how to listen and act as a support in your journey to recovery. In such cases, a counselor is recommended for guidance and assistance.

E: Experiencing Selflessness:

“Self-help is of no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true Self.” (Mathew 16:25 Msg.) Once we have become confident in our independence, and connected with others in loving relationships, we must then strive for self-sacrifice. We were made by God and for God. God is the source of our lives and He desires us to serve Him by serving others. “Whoever wants to be great must become a servant.” (Mark 10:43 Msg.) Selfless hearts make themselves available to serve, keeps a lookout for ways to help, makes the best with what they have, and serves with all the passion they have, in the area they are directed to serve in. They do all this with the utmost humility. They think more about others than about themselves and they know at all times that God is the owner of all things. They base their identity in Christ and they see ministry as an opportunity, not an obligation.

Volunteering Experience:

God has written that he has a plan for us and has equipped us for His plan. We have been working through the S.H.A.P.E. process. God has gifted us with tools unique to our particular purpose. The next step for us to experiment with different areas of service, to confirm or deny if God has gifted us in the areas the exercises targeted. In what area do you think you want to serve others? Have you considered volunteering as a means of exploring your unique S.H.A.P.E.? Volunteering your time not only gives you the opportunity to experiment with different ministries, but it allows you to work on your servant’s heart. God is more concerned with your attitude, than your achievements. “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 2:5 NIV) Considering your entire S.H.A.P.E., choose an area below you might fit most appropriately in serving at your Church, or in your community.

At Church:

- Small Group Leader
- Youth Volunteer
- Administration
- Community Support
- Children’s ministry (coordinator, teacher, nursery-etc)
- Worship Arts (music, power point, sound, arts)
- Communication (web design, newsletters)
- Facility Support (cleaning, lawn, maintenance)

In Your Community:

- Clubs
- United Way
- Disabilities Worker
- Sports Coach
- Salvation Army
- Sarnia Police
- Animal Rescue
- Visitor to elderly
- ESL Tutor
- Hospital Support
- Big Brother/Sister