

“Shaped to Make a Difference: Why God Shaped You The Way He Did.”

You don't have to travel too far around the world until you discover very quickly that God loves variety. He loves variety! He's made all shapes, sizes, colors, intensities, incredible variety in our world. There are over 300,000 species of beetles. God loves variety! In one cubic foot of snow there are 18 million snowflakes and not one of them are alike. Nobody else is going to see it but God. He loves variety. He likes variety in people too. Have you ever had to wait for an airplane and watch the parade of peculiar people walk by? God loves variety. And he made every single one of those individuals. He made you.

Psalm 139:13 says, **"You (God) created every part of me. You put me together in my mother's womb" (Psalm 139:13, Good News). "Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! It is amazing to think about. Your workmanship is marvelous" (Psalm 139:14, LB). "Your hands formed and shaped me" (Job 10:8, Good News).** Notice here: God created you; God put you together; God formed you; God shaped you. And not just externally, but internally, your personality.

From verses like this in scripture we learn some powerful foundational truths that are at the heart of this series we're starting today. One of those truths is **I am unique**. You're unique. There's not anybody in the world like you. There never has been. There never will be. When God made you he broke the mold. God does not create carbon copies, he only creates originals. If you were to search the whole world, you wouldn't find two people who had the same footprint, or fingerprint, or voiceprint. You are unique! Why did God make you different from every person who's ever lived? Why did he go to all that trouble? Because he wants you to know how much you matter to him.

That means, don't worry about trying to be like somebody else. You're meant to be you and only you. Accept yourself. If you find yourself thinking, "I wish I could be like him or her. I don't like my looks, or talents, or personality" nip that in the bud! That's stinkin' thinkin'! You are unique and you're wonderfully complex. And the Bible teaches in Ephesians 2:10 that when God looks at you and me, he says we are masterpieces. There may be days when you don't feel like a masterpiece, but God says you are. Remind yourself that God made you unique, shaped you, for a reason. Get busy finding that reason. That's what this series is all about! And that leads into the next foundational truth.

Another truth scripture points to is **I was shaped for a purpose!** God created everything in the world for a purpose, the Bible says, including you. You're not here by accident. There may be accidental parents, but there are no accidental children. You're not just taking up space. God made you for a reason. How you're shaped gives you direction in life, God gives you purpose. There's something that must be done in the world that only you can do. Your life has purpose.

Here's the thing. God won't force you to live out this purpose, to do his plan. You can waste your life. You can use it on all kinds of self-centered things and totally miss God's plan and purpose for your life. In fact, most people do. That's the tragedy. That's why they're so frustrated. Why they're lonely and why they worry. Because they're trying to do their own thing and be something somebody else wants them to be rather than what God wanted them to do and be. God says before you were even born I had holy plans for you. He had stuff in mind. God's got a purpose for your life. He really does.

God shaped you, formed you, made you unique and with a purpose. Scriptures point to five factors that make you who you are. **The 5 parts of my God-given SHAPE.** That's your SHAPE, and a lot of us don't really know what God shaped us to be or do. But discovering that is very, very important. Today I just want to overview the five factors of your SHAPE and how that SHAPE influences your life. In the weeks ahead we'll go into detail of each of these five components.

In the SHAPE class we talk about how God has shaped you for ministry. But in this series we're not going to talk about ministry, we're going to talk about how your unique, God-given SHAPE affects every other area of your life--your relationships, your career, your finances, your retirement, your enjoyment, your hobbies, your recreation. We're going to focus on how God uses your shape in every other area of life.

This is vital, so important, because the way God shaped you determines all kinds of things. Like what kinds of classes you should take in school and which you should avoid. Your SHAPE determines what kinds of friends you should have. Your SHAPE determines the type of person you should marry. Your SHAPE determines the things you're most likely going to be tempted by. Your SHAPE determines why certain things frustrate you more than they frustrate somebody else. Your SHAPE determines the best career pick for you. So knowing your SHAPE matters in every facet of life. In fact, you have to know your SHAPE in order to be all that God wants you to be. When you are working in the area of your SHAPE then you're going to go, "That's me. That's what I was made to do."

The Bible says you're a combination of five different factors. Your SHAPE, which is an acronym. **S - Spiritual gift/gifts.** The Bible says **"each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that" (1 Corinthians 7:7, TNIV).** There are at least twenty listed in the Bible and that's really not a complete list. Spiritual gifts include encouragement, leadership, discernment, helping, giving and many more. Every person who has chosen to follow Jesus Christ has at least one and your gift is to be used to benefit others. We're going to look at how that impacts your work, your life, your job, your career, your family, all of that.

H – Heart. It's what drives you, what motivates you. So what is that for you? What puts the quiver in your liver? What are you really passionate about? What makes you want to get up in the morning? All of us have different motivations, different drives, different interests. There are some things you care about very deeply and there are other things you couldn't care less about. That's revealing your heart. We have different hearts. The Bible says, **"For it is God who works in you, inspiring both the will and the deed, for his own chosen purpose!" (Philippians 2:13, NEB).** God puts desires in your heart. The way you discover what your heart, your basic motivation in life, is ask yourself: "What do I love to do? What do I really love to do? What is it I think about when my mind is able to think about anything? What do I really dream about?"

It's not by accident that you have certain interests and other people have other interests. God wants different kinds of motivations in life to accomplish different things.

A – Abilities. A lot of people think they don't have any abilities. Yes, you do. You just don't recognize them as abilities, or you take them for granted. I've heard that the average person has between 500 and 700 different kinds of abilities. That's just an average person. What are examples of abilities? Some of you are interested in computers, the technical side or the design side. Some of you have a natural ability with mechanical things. Some are good with numbers. Some are good with words--speaking or writing. We all have different abilities. Some people have the ability to work with people. Some people have abilities in music. Some people can think great ideas and abstract thoughts and put them all together. God gives you those abilities. You may have an ability to draw, to recruit, to research, to cook, to landscape, to build.... We all have different abilities. Those abilities are not by accident. God gave them to you for a purpose. The Bible says, **"Our competence comes from God." (2 Corinthians 3:5).** So, God has given you gifts, he's given you a heart (basic motivations in life), and he's given you abilities (natural talents and skills).

P – Personality. Some of you have personality with a capital P. Personality refers to the way you act, the way you feel, and the way you think. The root of your personality is the way you think, because the way you think determines the way you feel and the way you feel usually determines the way you act.

And personality is very complex. There are hundreds, maybe even thousands, of different personality traits. Some of us are very competitive, some are very cooperative, some are extroverts, some are introverts. Some of us are very self-expressive, others of us are very self-controlled. Some of us like variety, some like routine. How has God wired your personality?

It's part of your SHAPE -- your gifts, your heart, your ability, your personality. God wants to use your personality for a purpose. He gave it to you. It's not just something that came accidentally. He shaped you with it for a reason.

E – Experiences. We have all kinds of experiences in our lives. It doesn't matter if you were raised in the Beaver Cleaver household or the Gambino family, God can use it all. He can and he wants to, the positive **and** the painful. Paul wrote in Romans 8:28, "**And we know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into his plans**" (Romans 8:28, LB).

I've talked to so many people who had horrific experiences growing up, alcoholic parents, abuse, abandonment. Stuff they hid from others for years. But when they shared that story, the pain, others were drawn to them to experience healing and hope from somebody who made it through.

What's the experience in your past that maybe you keep wanting to hold back? God can challenge you in this series to let it come out to point people to him. The bottom line is this. You're made **by** God, to make a difference **for** God. As we start this series, jump in with both feet and do whatever it takes, get in a small group for the next 6 weeks—just do it! My challenge to you is give yourself permission to see yourself as the masterpiece you were created to be.

So these are the five things we're going to be looking at the next several weeks. Spiritual gifts, Heart, Ability, Personality, Experiences. These five things make you, you. All five factors are inter-related. They all work together. Each element influences the other. You are a combination of them.

But maybe you're thinking, "So what. God made me unique and there's nobody else like me. Why does it matter? Why should I care?" There are a lot of reasons. You see, once you understand your SHAPE it explains so much. It explains how you respond to authority. It explains how you handle criticism, how you like to be led. The way God has made you and designed you explains how you deal with confrontation, how you handle power and freedom, how you make friends, why you lose interest in a task and when you do it, why you find it hard to get started in a new activity sometimes. Your SHAPE explains how you deal with guilt, why you emphasize what you do, why you get close to people or why you don't get close to people. It's all explained by your SHAPE. Your SHAPE explains what makes you mad, what makes you sad, what makes you worried, what makes you happy, what makes you fearful. Because it's you! That's why this may be one of the most important series that we could do.

When you discover your SHAPE it has some powerful benefits. It reduces stress. How? Well, you stop comparing yourself to other people. You stop trying to do what you're not gifted to do. You build on your strengths. You recognize your limitations. You maximize what you're good at and don't worry about the rest. That's a stress reducer.

When you discover your SHAPE it increases success. What is success? It's not making a lot of money. I know people who are making a lot of money who aren't successful. You see, real success is knowing God's will and being right in the center of it. Success is being what God meant you to be. It's figuring out who you are and then being it! Finding your niche and saying, "That's me!" That's success.

Discovering your SHAPE deepens satisfaction. A satisfying life is when you are doing what you're shaped to do, what God made for you to do. Freedom comes from doing what you're gifted to do. You enjoy what God made you to be. All of a sudden you feel the love of God a whole lot more! Because you're in harmony with his plan.

Discovering your SHAPE builds self esteem. Doing what you're shaped to do builds self esteem because you understand the truth that you matter to God. Jesus Christ proved it. He died on the cross. He didn't die for junk. He died for you. Jesus Christ proved how much you matter to God by giving his life on the cross for you. That's salvation. But the next truth is that you were saved for a purpose. And that's the over-arching theme in this series, how God has shaped you for a purpose. Maybe you don't feel like your life has mattered much up to this point. This series could be the turning point.

Listen to this letter from an attorney who resigned his law office to become the director of a rescue mission. He says, "Over the years you've delivered many encouraging messages. One message has been particularly helpful to me and in turn to others. It...concerns our unique shape. I frequently refer to our shape when talking to discouraged men and women along skid row. I point out that even the most desperate tragic situations can form the basis for the good that God can bring out of our lives. In the language of the street, you

can't deal God a bad hand. Yesterday, I was struck by the impact of these words had upon a man named Richard. As a toddler, Richard was abandoned in a hotel room by his prostitute mother. He served overseas, he's had two failed marriages and children with whom he has little or no relationships. In sum, at this point in his life, his forties, he was overcome by pain and frustration, and emotionally was an abandoned child. When I reminded Richard of his unique shape and that 'God never wastes a hurt' you could see the despair beginning to lift. Though weeping, there was a clear sense of joy and celebration. It was as though God was embracing and tenderly stroking someone who, for many years, was convinced he was utterly unlovable."

My prayer is that at the end of this series you'll be able to say like Paul, "**By the grace of God, I am what I am**" (**1 Corinthians 15:10, NIV**). That you'll not only accept what God made you but you'll enjoy it and you'll thank him for it and you'll see the wisdom of what he did in your gifts, and heart, and ability, and personality, and experiences. And that you will say, "I want to contribute my uniqueness to this world for the glory of God."

Iranaeus was a great Christian leader in the first century. He once said "**The glory of God is a human being fully alive**" (**Iranaeus**). That's what happens when we discover our SHAPE. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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