

“From Me to You (with Love)”

Soul Shift – part #2. Based on the book by Steve DeNeff and David Drury

Matthew 7:1-14

[61] (Welcome, prayer, etc.)

[62] Last week we invited everyone to join the “Soul Shift,” our all-church series based on the book by Steve DeNeff and David Drury. We are walking through a seven-week journey to let the Holy Spirit change us from the inside-out. While many people desire to change (just look at our New Year’s Resolution fads), we most often fail to make those positive changes stick. Soul Shift is a resource we can engage to make those changes permanently.

[63] Today is the first of seven shifts in our thinking and doing. It’s called, “From Me to You.” It sounds like one of those little gift tags on Christmas presents, you know, the simple ones where you write your name and the name of the receiver. “From Me to You.” Even before you open the present, you feel special. “From me to you? That’s so sweet.”

While it is easy to put a tag on a present, it is harder to shift your soul in the direction of others. So think of today’s shift as a gift. We should desire to give ourselves to others for their benefit, to have them experience that same “That’s so sweet moment.”

[64] Selfishness unfortunately is built into our DNA. I can prove it to you with a simple question. What are a typical baby’s first words? “No” and “Mine.” And “Wahhhhh!” Maybe eventually they learn “Momma.” Children cry because they have needs. And yet no one usually looks at a baby and says, “Stop being so selfish!” (At least, I hope you don’t!)

Self-preservation is a part of who we are. Yet we do reach a point where it is expected that we learn to obey others, listen to others, work for others, and treat others well. It’s the “share your toys” moment. And it’s a life-long struggle to overcome those selfish impulses. Sadly, we don’t actually learn everything we need to know in kindergarten.

[65] It is possible to become selfless though. Let me tell you about my friend, Annie. She was one of the best selfless saints I’ve ever met. She was gracious, always happy to see you, and always made you feel you were important.

Literally on her deathbed, the last words she said to my mom were, “Don’t worry about me. I’m all right. Go be with your husband.” Annie was faith and grace embodied in her words and actions, right up to her last breath.

Do you know someone like that? Right now, we’re all smiling as we think of them. The challenge for us is to let God make us all that. Plainly put, to make us all like Jesus.

[66] We just read a handful of Jesus’s commands in our scripture this morning, and most of them deal with how we treat others. Matthew 7 is at the end of the passage commonly called the “Sermon on the Mount,” and it contains a mountain of material. Just look at the things Jesus tells us to do: “Don’t judge. Don’t be a hypocrite. Admit your own faults first. Don’t waste what is precious. Ask God for what you need. Give good gifts to others.” I don’t see anything in there I object to, but let me be real: Jesus, that stuff is pretty hard. That’s probably why he says few find the narrow path that leads to life.

[67] In the center of this chapter is this well-known sentence: “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 7:12). We know this as the Golden Rule. “Do unto others what you would have done unto you.”

If you’ve been in church a long time, you might be surprised to know that the Bible does not own the trademark to the Golden Rule. It exists in many cultures throughout the world, in various other writings. However, there is one important distinction. [68] In its other forms, the Golden Rule goes something like, “Do to others what they have done to you.” In other words, respond the same way as they have already done. In a positive relationship, that’s all well and good, but in a vengeful relationship, that is a slippery slope.

The way Jesus states the Golden Rule, it is proactive. “Do to others what you would have them do to you.” Don’t wait for them to act first. You go do it now, no matter how they might respond.

[69] Why does Jesus tell us to love our enemies? Why does Jesus tell us to turn the other cheek? Why does Jesus tell us to give without expecting anything in return? It’s more than a command. It’s a mental shift, a way of life that comes from a transformation of the heart. The gospel is summed up the same way: God

did for us what we could not do – God sent Jesus to die on the cross to save us. The root of the Me to You shift is embodied in Jesus Christ – he already showed us what it truly means to love others.

[70] Steve DeNeff, in Soul Shift, says (p. 38) “The shift from thinking primarily about ‘me’ to thinking primarily about ‘you’ is to curve outwards toward others, so that you see them first.” He goes on: “The heart of the shifted soul is broken by the needs of others, not the self. The eyes of the shifted soul are constantly looking to the needs of others.” (p.38)

[71] Selfishness may be inherent to our lives, but so is compassion and empathy. Nearly everyone in this world, witnessing a tragedy, feels called to respond. A house fire, a tornado, a car accident, a dog at the animal shelter: these instances tug at our heart strings. However, we do not always respond in kindness and love, because we have to wrestle with our response: which voice will win?

Loving others is where the “rubber meets the road” in our faith. I commend people who say, “I love God!” That is great, but it’s kind of hard to prove. However, when you say, “I love others,” the results, or the lack thereof, are a lot more visible.

[72] There’s a story about two rooms in heaven. St. Peter is giving someone a tour, and these two rooms look identical at first. In the center, there is a circular table with a huge pot of delicious soup. Around each table, there are a dozen people sitting down; each has a long spoon tied to one arm. However, the spoons are so long that it is impossible for anyone to reach their own mouth without spilling the soup. In one room, the people are happy and well-fed. In the other room, the people are sullen and hungry. “The difference,” explains Peter, “is that in second room, they have not yet learned to feed each other.”

Are we going to learn to not only feed each other, but to feed the world, physically and spiritually? Literally, we are having lunch today before our Soul Shift small groups. That’s good. And as excited as I am about this series, I will again reiterate my fear: I do not want to mistake this program for the Messiah. Jesus is the only one who can make a lasting change in your heart. Completing Soul Shift in eight weeks is not the end goal. My hope is that through this

program, through our accountability and cooperation together, we will find making those changes is easier and more fulfilling.

[73] By the way, I want to remind you of an opportunity that will be coming on October 30th, the Sunday that after we finish the last Soul Shift. I’ve asked each small group leader to solicit their class for testimonies. I want our church to be able to celebrate this journey by hearing how God has changed our lives. It might be a simple shift that occurred before or during this series. Whatever it is, I should be some simple encouragement you can share with the rest of the congregation. If you have a story, please let your small group leader know.

[74] In the end of the “Me to You” chapter in the Soul Shift book, Steve DeNeff tells the “lima beans” story where he helped a single-mother and her child. It’s a tear-jerker. I’m not going to tell it here. Make sure you read the book. My point is, we should all have a story like that. Multiple stories, in fact. If we shift from “Me” to “You,” others will notice. All of us can begin to stop focusing on ourselves and give our attention and love to someone else. All of us can begin to have our hearts and souls shifted, even just a little.

Married couples know about this. (By the way, Mark and Carol just celebrated 50 years!) There was a time when you realized that you wanted to spend the rest of your life with your spouse. You simply would not have been able to convince him/her to marry you if they thought you would only focus on yourself. That’s the meaning of “for better or worse, for richer or poorer, to have and to hold.” It is one of the best examples of a Me to You shift that I can think of.

[75] Look again at the memory verse on the cover of your bulletin. (Philippians 2:1-4) The Apostle Paul is right: putting the interests of others above our own is the only way to make our joy complete. I encourage you today, commit one way to love others this week.

Let’s pray.

Memory Verse: Philippians 2:3-4

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."

Reflection Questions:

1. How often do you think about what others think of you?
2. How is it with your soul? (How often do you ask yourself that question?)
3. How often do you pay attention to the soul-state of people around you?
4. What would it take to change your mindset to "others first"?
5. What is one way you will love others first this week?