

# SOULSHIFT

the measure of a life transformed

Steve DeNeff | David Drury

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## SOULSHIFT

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# PREFACE

## WE WANT TO BE DIFFERENT, BUT WE DON'T WANT TO CHANGE

**A**re you tired of people kicking sand in your face?”  
Was I ever!

“And do you wish you could stand up to them?”

Yup.

“Let me prove I can make you a new man!”

He had me.

It was an advertisement in the back of a comic book. Wearing a leopard-skin swimsuit, the bodybuilder Charles Atlas promoted his new weight-training program for wimps. A cartoon showed a beach bully grabbing a scrawny kid and saying, “Listen here! I’d smash you in the face . . . only you’re so skinny you might blow away.” The scrawny kid’s girlfriend taunted him, “Oh, don’t let it bother you, little boy.” I (Steve) will never forget that. I was thirteen years old.



Just like the scrawny kid in the comic, I was getting sand kicked in my face. Bullies would cut in front of me in the lunch line. I was tired of getting run over in the hall, tired of losing every wrestling match in gym class, tired of Coach Smiley (my gym teacher who never smiled) ridiculing my torso. But what was I to do? I couldn't help that I had grown so fast that I was all skin and bones, lanky and awkward. I was the scrawny kid on the beach (minus the girlfriend). My arms were as thick as a garden hose. My knees were knobby and my chest concave. My ribs stuck through my skin like bars on a xylophone.

But thanks to my new friend Charles Atlas, no bully was going to steal my girl—if I ever got one. Atlas was going to make a new man out of me.

The weight-training book was supposedly free, but I didn't believe it. Some of my friends had been snookered by these things before, so my best friend and I created a weight-training program of our own. We worked out five days a week. We ate wheat fiber pancakes and drank raw egg shakes. We wore weighted ankle bracelets. We even did isometric exercises in our chairs at school. Very gradually, it paid off. At the ripe age of sixteen, I was bench-pressing two hundred fifty pounds, curling eighty, and military pressing one hundred twenty. Not terribly impressive, I know, but I was betting it was more than Smiley at least. The trouble was that you couldn't tell. My arms went from a garden hose to vacuum hose. My thighs increased to the size of my knees and my ribs still looked like a xylophone. When I wore my tank top muscle shirt, my sisters called it a bone shirt. One of my friends said I could pose for Atlas weight-training program . . . as the before picture.

For three years, I had lifted those weights and had little to show for it. However, my best friend did. He developed a fifty-two-inch chest and twenty-three-inch arms, all hung on a six-foot-eight-inch frame. He was massive. He was hitting home runs; I was still hitting doubles. He got bigger; I got slightly stronger. But I wasn't lifting weights to get stronger; I lifted them to look better.

I felt cheated. Charles Atlas, with his chiseled body and leopard-skin swimsuit, had promised to make a new man out of me. No matter how

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much weight I lifted or how many eggs I ate, I did not look like Charles Atlas. Bullies were still taking cuts, and Smiley was still laughing at my torso. What good was that? So, I quit lifting. I am what I am, I decided. Only, I could never get myself to believe it. In the years that followed, I would try again. Then quit again. Then try again. This went on for years. In fact, I never gave up wanting to look better. But I gave up believing I could change.

Have you ever made a New Year's resolution to lose weight or get organized or spend more time with your family? Have you promised yourself that you would finish that degree or pay off that debt or fix up the house only to fall back again into the same old mess?

Diet and exercise websites experience a strong upsurge in hits during the first week of every year, reflecting our collective desire to change. Millions of people make New Year's resolutions to get skinny and in shape, but for most, the resolve is short-lived. Researcher Bill Tancer says, "By the fifth day of January, visits to dieting sites begin a steep slide that won't show any increases until summer, when there will be renewed dieting interest [in time] for bathing suit season."<sup>1</sup> The reason is that "we are a society that is increasingly fixated on finding instant gratification," says Tancer.<sup>2</sup> Anything that takes an inordinate amount of time is out of sync with everything else in our microwave-speed lives. But we remain compelled by instinct to make commitments to get better. At times, we are prompted by seeing a virtue in someone else. Other times, a crisis wakes us up, and we emerge with a new commitment to change something about ourselves. We want to be different, even if we seem to lack the tenacity to make it happen.

The same holds true with spiritual things. We want to be different in the way we know God. We want to have different attitudes. We want a different approach to the temptations we face. We commit to all kinds of spiritual activities, the spiritual versions of my teenage weight-training program, in hopes of being spiritually different. However, most of us never develop a clear image of what it means to be different. I had a relatively clear picture at age thirteen (thanks to Mr. Atlas) of what I wanted my body to look

like. But I had a somewhat fuzzy picture, even at age thirty, of what I wanted my soul to look like.

By the age of thirty, I knew only that I wanted to quit sinning and be closer to God. Apparently, I was not alone. Research has shown that fewer than one in five of those who call themselves “born again” have any measurable goals for spiritual growth.<sup>3</sup> Many reported that their goal was to “become a better Christian” or “to grow spiritually.” However, they did not—in fact, could not—define what this meant. Researcher George Barna writes, “We found that six out of ten believers have no sense of what they want to achieve or become, and roughly two out of ten have only the vaguest idea.”<sup>4</sup> The dilemma is not that Christians aren’t interested in spiritual growth or that they aren’t willing to pay the price, but that they have only a limited and narrow understanding of what spiritual growth really means. They have never defined the target.

We can’t blame individuals too much for this. While 95 percent say that their church encourages spiritual growth, less than half say that it “is one of the two or three highest priorities in their church.”<sup>5</sup> About the same number (less than half) say that their church has communicated spiritual goals or established some standard expectations for the church. Only one out of five said that their church has some means of evaluating the spiritual maturity of the congregation.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus commissioned us to make disciples of all nations. But apparently, we’re not entirely sure how to do that. Believers might say that their church encourages spiritual growth, but the statistics show that by this they only mean their church doesn’t get in the way. Ironically, most of those who said that their church has not identified a clear path of discipleship, also said that they “would welcome any advice that the church might have for growing spiritually,” and even that they would likely “pursue the changes suggested to them.”<sup>7</sup>

That’s why we’ve written this book. *SoulShift* is a clear and measurable way of defining the target for spiritual transformation. It differs from most discipleship programs in that it clearly identifies what it means to be a disciple in

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every area of life. Most programs tell you how to get started but never bother to tell you where you're going. Most spiritual growth resources stress ever-increasing discipleship inputs. They are often "to-do list" oriented. You have to read this daily or do that monthly or work with this person or go to that session. They are all good behaviors, no doubt, and perhaps quite helpful. But all this activity may leave you wondering, "How much is enough?" and "What am I trying to become with all my religious activity?"

Instead of focusing on inputs, *SoulShift* is an outcome-based, down-to-earth approach to your spirituality. You can enter this spiritual transformation process at any stage of life. You will be empowered to engage in seven shifts that will change your life—and keep changing it.

We hope this gives you an alternative to plug-and-play spirituality. Our dream is that it will help you to connect the dots of what might seem like random acts of disconnected spirituality in your life. We want you to make sense of it all and to actually see spiritual progress. By engaging with *SoulShift*, you will know exactly where you're going and how to get there.

This outcome-based approach is crucial because our human instinct to be different has competition. We have an opposing instinct that is just as compelling. We may want to be different, but we also want to quit becoming different when it gets difficult. We want to be different, but we don't want to change.

We wrote this book for people just like that—for people who have tried hard to be different but feel they haven't changed as much as they ought. It's for people who know what they should do but have trouble doing it. It's for those who have that one nagging sin that seems to float over them like a ghost.

That's not the way God wants it. Jesus didn't die on the cross so that we could all have more guilt in our lives. He died so we might be free.



# INTRODUCTION

**M**ore than half a million people have heart-bypass surgery in America every year. Most are told that surgery is only a temporary fix; that the only long-term solution is a change in lifestyle and diet; that exercising, losing weight, and quitting smoking will increase their chance at living. Such advice is perhaps never more welcome and effective than when a person has had such a near-death experience. Instead, after one year, more than 90 percent of heart-bypass surgery patients report that they have not changed their lifestyle. Like most of us, they want to be different, but they don't want to change.

Janet Polivy, a sociology professor at the University of Toronto, has called our “persistent attempts at change despite previous failures” the false hope syndrome.<sup>1</sup> Our attempts to be different, she says, offer a sense of control and of at least being good enough to recognize the need for change, even if those feelings are misleading.

Many people settle in the land of compromise—not as bad as they once were but not as good as they had hoped to be. Some live their whole lives there, where promises and dreams decline.

The same land of compromise is populated by millions of Christians who have said similar things about their spiritual lives. They continue to battle with two instincts. One is to make promises, to decide to be different. The other is to quit, to decline to make the changes needed to really be different. These two instincts play themselves out in every new job, church, and relationship in our lives. What is at the bottom of this dilemma? Maybe the motivation to be different is misdirected.



The motivation to change is often based on a belief about how we will look in the future. Just as I (Steve) felt discontent with myself and imagined my future, complete with impressive Charles Atlas–style muscles, some people are discontented with their spiritually scrawny selves. They dream of being spiritually strong. They’re so motivated by their dream that they will do, buy, and read anything to get better.

Too often, people are motivated by external things, rather than internal things. They don’t just want to get stronger; they want others to know about it. They don’t want to be more spiritual; they want others to see them as more spiritual. So they begin a series of actions designed to help them be different—to create a new version of themselves. They start disciplines, break habits, make new friends, and force themselves to engage in activities that are unnatural for them—the spiritual equivalent to lifting weights and eating raw eggs. They do this believing they will get immediate results. When all of their hard work fails to quickly produce the desired results, they stop trying. I am what I am, they decide. But the instinct to be different remains despite the instinct to quit.

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Here is the vital difference between being *transformed* and being *reformed*. Reformation usually has these three characteristics: (1) it comes from a voice on the outside; (2) it begins with a series of actions; and (3) it expects immediate results. But transformation by God's Holy Spirit works in exactly the opposite way: (1) it comes from a voice on the inside; (2) it begins with a change deep in our souls; and (3) it patiently waits for the results to show.

Transformation is a miracle, but it is not magic. It doesn't happen in an instant. It isn't easy or fun to watch. It doesn't defy logic. Sins don't disappear overnight. And we don't pull new virtues out of thin air. If you have tried many times to be different but haven't changed, if you feel defeated by the same old sin, or if God feels more distant than before, take heart! Don't quit. God has not given up on you. Don't give up on yourself.

Begin again. Only this time, ask God to change you into a different person. Don't make him a bunch of promises. Don't say that you will get control of your life. It's not about quitting everything cold turkey. It is better if you come to him with nothing—nothing but your frustration. It is better to come broken and bankrupt.

Ask God to reveal to you the true condition of your soul. Don't worry. He won't dump it all on you in one day. But you cannot discover it on your own. Only the Holy Spirit can probe the depths of your soul and reveal it to you. However, the Spirit will not invade you without being asked. You must ask him to come in, even daily.

There's a *Peanuts* comic where Charlie Brown said, "Sometimes I lie awake at night, and I ask, 'Where have I gone wrong?' Then a voice says to me, 'This is going to take more than one night.'" The process of peering into your soul will take much longer than one night.

As you tour the interior of your soul with God, tell him that you are sorry for all of the things about you that you cannot change, and name them. Grieve every one. Then, when you are through, get up out of your ashes and humbly say that you will begin again.



For change to be genuine, there must be changes made in the soul. We who came into this world wired one way must go through a series of changes at the soul level until we leave this world wired another way. We call each change a SoulShift, and each is a seismic change deep in our being. They are far below the surface so that no one can see them at their start. They are like the earth's tectonic plates—always moving, always shifting, but rarely do people on the surface think about them.

Only when there is a major shift in tectonic plates do they alter anything on the surface. Earthquakes have the power to completely change the landscape. People who were once unaware of the shifting plates are confronted with evidence that is real and overwhelming. In a similar way, a SoulShift is a mostly subtle, sometimes revolutionary change that God makes on the interior of our lives and which alters everything else about us—from our habits to our personality to our tastes and preferences.

A SoulShift is not typically an abrupt change ushered in by a simple decision to follow Christ. These changes happen later. They begin in a day—sometimes in a moment—but they are not completed in that moment. They are often reflected in an action, but they are not the same as that action. They are deeper than that. They are movements or evolutions. Sometimes they are as dramatic as an earthquake and at other times as subtle as the rising of the sun. Sometimes they are evident to everyone, and sometimes they are evident to no one but God and us. But what all of these shifts have in common is this: They are deeper and even more permanent than a habit; they have repercussions that take time to work out; and they are a turn away from our culture toward the culture of Christ. They disentangle us from the world even as we remain in it. Yes, they affect the way we act, but they are more about the way we are wired. Embracing a SoulShift is a major step forward for those who want to be different but don't want to change.

In this book, we address seven shifts that will help you move beyond wanting to be different to experiencing genuine change:



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1. Me to You is a shift in orientation from focusing on ourselves to focusing on others.

2. Slave to Child is a shift in identity from serving God to loving God.

3. Seen to Unseen is a shift in values from embracing things that are temporary to embracing things that are eternal.

4. Consumer to Steward is a shift in ownership from acquiring things for ourselves to offering what we have to God and others.

5. Ask to Listen is a shift in posture from asking others to listening to God.

6. Sheep to Shepherd is a shift in influence from following the crowd to leading like Christ.

7. Me to We is a shift in priority from individualism to community.

We have been asked many times why there are only seven shifts and not twelve or three, since these numbers are equally important in the Bible. Actually, we considered using the biblical number forty, or even 144,000, but it seemed like a lot of work. Seriously, we have tried to cover as broad a spectrum as seems wise for a person to engage in, aiming to be comprehensive but not cumbersome. These are seven of the most crucial and often neglected changes that must be made in a transformed life.

However, we do not pretend that this is an exhaustive list. You might have three or four that you're thinking of right now. This is only a way to get started. But we do believe that growth in these seven areas could mean, for most of us, a very different kind of life. We also don't pretend to have invented these areas of transformation. As you will see, they are found everywhere in Scripture and have been the core of how people change to become like Christ ever since Christ himself walked on the earth.

At the same time, *SoulShift* is no ordinary discipleship program. It's not a mold of some spiritual Charles Atlas that you're supposed to squeeze into, no leopard-skin swimsuit and no beach full of people to impress. Instead, each one of the shifts looks different when you lay it over your personality. For instance, if God has made you passive or introverted, you will still need to move from being a Sheep to Shepherd, but you will lead in a different way

and always within the sphere of influence God has already given you. The shift from Consumer to Steward will look quite different for a teenager than it will for a corporate executive. And for one who was raised by abusive parents, the shift from Slave to Child will be much more difficult and dramatic, even more important, than for someone who had loving parents who affirmed them. Each shift is made within your life—the only one you have—not someone else’s. In fact, you’re already making these shifts in your life in many ways, but maybe you just didn’t know what to call them.

A SoulShift is like baking bread. As a shift rises in your life, it performs the function of the yeast. It’s not the pan. It doesn’t force you into a mold that you got from someone else (the pan); it is the catalyst (the yeast) of the future you. It takes the form of whatever culture or of whatever circumstance you are in, and it blends with your personality and causes you to rise to your potential in Christ.

By beginning with the future you in mind, it might seem daunting. You’ll need a starting point. The way to begin is to partner with what God’s Spirit is already doing. As he walks around the interior of your life looking at the problems but also at your potential, you must work in tandem with him by choosing the forces that influence you. He will work in, and you must work out (Phil. 2:12–13)—always in that order.



Now, imagine another photo, not of Charles Atlas, but of you. Imagine that God has a refrigerator in heaven with your picture on it. It’s not a picture of you ten or twenty years ago. It’s more like a photo of you ten or twenty years from now. Imagine that! God knows the future you. It’s not about your outward appearance. His picture shows what’s inside you—what motivates you, what your fears are, what dreams you’ve achieved, and what hopes you still have. Imagine what this shift in your life could look like.

Imagine if every morning when you woke up, your first instinct was to do what is right. And you loved it. That one nagging sin that you just can’t

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get over? It's gone. You're not going to commit it today, and you know this. Remember how you always defended yourself or compared yourself when certain people were in the room? Gone! Now you have confidence. You're happy with who God made you to be. You don't worry whether your stock is rising or falling in the eyes of others, trying to please people constantly. You can accept criticism and not have it define you.

Imagine being just as concerned about other people—about their marriage, kids, or job—as you were once concerned about yourself. Imagine not wanting someone else to make the last out in the softball game or going to a basketball game and empathizing with the refs. Who does that?

Imagine knowing the will of God so well that you don't have to ask all the time. What if the Bible became the most relevant thing in your life? When you read it, another voice would speak out from within its pages, and it would make perfect sense to you. Imagine not running to the priest or the bookstore or the counselor to know what to do because you have heard from God himself when you were by yourself.

Imagine living on a fraction of your income and still feeling that it was plenty, and then using the rest for something bigger than you? What if you suddenly made plenty of money, and you never got a raise, and you used less of everything you always use.

Imagine praying twenty times as much as you do now and doing it because you like to, not because you had to, just as you like hanging out with your best friends. And what if your heart was broken by things that break the heart of God? What if you could see, with your mind's eye, a whole new set of realities that were invisible to everyone else but just as real—even more real—than everything around you?

Imagine what all this might be like, with your soul shifted toward God in every way.

Last month, I (Steve) conducted a funeral for a woman who died from brain cancer. A few hours before she passed, she opened her eyes and looked away, past those gathered around her bed. She then smiled and said, "I never knew." It was as though she was staring into something that was

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in the room, right next to her husband's head, but she was the only one who could see it. A moment later, as she gazed into that realm, she said, "I have so much to learn." And within a few moments, she was gone. Well, imagine if you learned much of that in the next several years? Imagine knowing in this world the truths of the next one, because you can see it with the eye of faith.

This is the dream God has for you. It's the picture of the future you that he puts on his fridge. It's you—restored to his original plan. He's already at work restoring your future.

But where do you begin? What kinds of things should you infuse into your soul—your life—to change it? That's what this book is about. For the next seven chapters, we'll take a look at each SoulShift, unpacking what it means in the Bible and in life. We'll give examples of each with practical suggestions for how you can cooperate with what God is already doing.

Are you ready to shift?

# SEVEN SOULSHIFTS

**1 ME TO YOU** is a shift in orientation from focusing on ourselves to focusing on others.

We are wired, all of us, for self-preservation. From birth, our first struggles are selfish ones. So the shift from thinking primarily about me (yourself) to thinking primarily about you (others) is one of the most fundamental shifts we will make. Indeed, the whole world is different when we see it through the eyes of someone else. Once we've shifted from Me to You, the horizons of life expand infinitely because we no longer see ourselves as the point. (See pages 31–45.)

**2 SLAVE TO CHILD** is a shift in identity from serving God to loving God. We are consumed with laws, sin, judgment, serving God, and getting crowns in heaven. We lack confidence in our relationship with God. We

wonder if we can do this or that and still be a Christian. We worry we've crossed the line. When we shift from this kind of slavery and realize we are God's children, everything changes. Instead of just serving God, we are concerned with pleasing him (Eph. 5:10). We are no longer just doing God's will; we have God's mind (1 Cor. 2:16). We accept our identity as children of God and live with all of the privileges and responsibilities that come with it. (See pages 47–60.)

**3 SEEN TO UNSEEN** is a shift in values from embracing things that are temporary to embracing things that are eternal.

We are born into a tangible world that we can touch, smell, see, and feel. But right next to our heads—as close as the air we breathe—is a kingdom that is eternal and invisible. Over time, God will teach us how to see a kingdom that, although invisible, is approaching with unnerving speed. God wants us to learn to see now what we will have no problem seeing after we are in heaven. Things we once considered unimportant will have a new urgency, and things we once valued might become more trivial. (See pages 61–71.)

**4 CONSUMER TO STEWARD** is a shift in ownership from acquiring things for ourselves to offering what we have to God and others.

Our souls may be saved, but we are still consumers. We complain about our salaries, fatten our retirements, stockpile more than we can use, and then want more. Over time, the Holy Spirit will change us into being stewards who see that all we have is only borrowed from God. We will become less attached to things and more generous. We will no longer measure life in terms of possessions. And we won't even miss them when they're gone. (See pages 73–88.)

**5 ASK TO LISTEN** is a shift in posture from asking others to listening to God.

We look outside of ourselves for answers—to sermons and books, seeking advisors to tell us exactly what to do. We worry about missing the will of

God for our lives. We read the Bible like a desk reference as though it should answer our questions. When we make this shift, rather than asking God or someone else to answer our questions, we begin to ask the questions God is already answering. We will let him speak. We will let him set the agenda. We will listen. (See pages 89–106.)

**6 SHEEP TO SHEPHERD** is a shift in influence from following the crowd to leading like Christ.

Most of us are quite good at following or we would not be Christians at all. But something happens when Jesus, who first asked us to follow him, then tells us to lead. The call to follow becomes the call to lead in the very circles in which we once followed. Our prayers become an intercession. To volunteer is to minister. Our careers become a calling and we, who were sheep, become shepherds. (See pages 107–123.)

**7 ME TO WE** is a shift in priority from individualism to community. Something pivotal happens in our lives when we begin to accept the identity of our community. We seek counsel. We accept correction. We allow those around us to teach us about God and interpret him for us. We use our talents and develop our gifts according to affirmation of others. In short, we find ourselves as Jesus said we would, by losing ourselves in the community of God. (See pages 125–140.)