

## “Shift: Accelerating on the Discipleship Highway - A Life of Openness”

Scripture: Matthew 26:36-46; Psalm 139:23-24

Graphics: car, highway, shifter

Big Truth: Discipleship is not a passive event or anything we complete in our lifetime. Following Jesus is a process that takes intentional engagement and sacrifice to live fully into the call of Jesus to, “follow me.” There are milestones along the way to help orient us and show us what areas we can engage: Worship, Community, Openness, Obeying, Serving, and Sharing.

Focus phrase: A life of openness is using all our senses to be available to what God has for us.

### 1. Introduction

- A. Shift: Accelerating on the Discipleship Highway. That’s the name of this series that’s 100% focused on moving us, as individuals and as a church, into a more robust passion for doing three things:
  - i. 1 - more robust passion for being part of the body of Christ here at PUMC,
  - ii. 2 - passion for becoming more like Jesus in all areas of life, and,
  - iii. 3 - more robust passion for joining Jesus in His ministry through us.
- B. Shifting is all about allowing the Holy Spirit to make the next change in your life which will increase the Kingdom impact you have for Him in this world. Just like a car shifts to go faster, we shift to grow as disciples.
- C. This sermon series is a journey of exploring the highway on which Jesus is leading us. We’re studying 6 milestones that are like the milestones on the highway that tell you where you are when on a journey. Each discipleship milestone gives us information about where we are in our discipleship, gives you a chance to discern the next step, and make a commitment to up-shift.
- D. And, as I’ve said, this pursuit of a higher level of capacity in following Jesus is for EVERYONE. It’s for the person that’s new to church...for the person that’s been here for 90 years...and for everyone in between. It’s for women and men and youth and children...it’s for people of all walks of life and any personality. See, because all of you are here...and because you’re here that means that you’re interested in learning more and more about growing to be a better disciple of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.
- E. The vision of our mission is that every family in our community has the opportunity to believe in and follow Jesus...and it for us to see together.
- F. So far, we’ve studied A Life of Worship and A Life of Community. Those two milestones were all about being part of the body of Christ - the church.
- G. Now, we shift into our second category of discipleship, “becoming more like Jesus.”

- H. As Christians, we don't primarily follow a set of rules or a book or church traditions. We follow a MAN...and His name is Jesus.
- I. I don't know about you, but I can't become like a set of rules or a book or a church tradition. But, I CAN become more like Jesus...and today, as we begin this category, we start with studying A Life of Openness to God.
- J. Next week, we'll look at A Life of Obedience. Together, those two aspects of our faith life are exactly what Jesus exhibits in His relationship with the Father. Jesus was open to the Father...and he was obedient to the Father.
- K. A life of openness is using all our senses to be available to God's will.
- L. We have the opportunity to learn more about how WE TOO can do that.
- M. Let's pray and then open our Bibles...
- N. PRAY!**
- O. In your Bibles, let's move together to Matthew chapter 26, starting in verse 36. This is after the Last Supper we talked about last week...after Judas attempted to break the community of the disciples. This is after Jesus told the disciples that LOVE is what builds community.
- P. After the supper, Jesus led the disciples to a grove of olive trees called Gethsemane. We pick up the narrative in verse 36 of chapter 26.

## 2. Scripture

### A. READ Matthew 26:36-46

- i. (picture of the Garden - praying) Stacy and I spent some time in the place where it's believed Jesus and his disciples went on the night described here.
- ii. We had a 15-20 minutes to just soak it all in and think about what this spot means. In that moment, the only thing I could think of to do was to kneel down and pray.
- iii. As I was kneeling, I recalled this scene in Jesus' life. I was, honestly, overcome with emotion to even BE there. But I remember thinking, "This is the place where Jesus' willingness to be open to the ultimate plan of the Father came to its climax. He said, 'Yes...whatever you want, Father.'"
- iv. The disciples on the other hand, were, well, like disciples. They were eager to go with Jesus to the place because it was an honor for the Teacher to invite them to come. And then, if you're Peter, James, or John, you're even more honored to have Jesus invite you to come a little further with him.
- v. Jesus then asked them to stay put, AND STAY AWAKE. They had ONE JOB! Stay put...and stay AWAKE.
- vi. Jesus went a little farther and prayed. He prayed the raw prayer of someone who isn't sure what to do. He prayed the prayer of someone who has a

SENSE of what God is asking, but wants desperately to guard himself from it and from the Father.

- vii. “IF there is a way...Father...take this cup away from me. Get me out of this.” It was like Jesus was trying to shut the door, but because He was connected with the Father in such a perfect way, all he could do was open it again. “Yet not what I want, but what YOU want.”
- viii. Good...that’s settled. I’ll go back to the dis... “WHAT?! Are you seriously sleeping? You had ONE JOB!!”
- ix. And for some reason, this encounter with the disciples made Jesus rethink his prayer from minutes earlier. “Are they even READY for me to do this? Are you sure, Father?” So, Jesus goes BACK into prayer to pry open that door once again. This time, he finally prays, “...YOUR will be done.”
- x. Door open...ready to DO this. Back to the disciples...SLEEPING! ARGHHH! But, he doesn’t talk to them or try to wake them up.
- xi. Back to prayer...once last time. Settled. Back to the disciples. I’m sure by now Jesus was expecting them to be sleeping. He woke them up, and just said, basically, “I’m done. Let’s go. Judas is coming to betray me.” In the back of his mind, was He thinking, “...just like the whole lot of you?”
- xii. The text doesn’t say that, but Jesus is focused on what needed to happen because he spent that time being completely OPEN to what the Father was asking.
- xiii. And this wasn’t anything new for Jesus - this openness. When Jesus was 12 in the Temple, his parents were frantically looking for him and found him with the teachers and scribes, learning. When Jesus’ mother Mary scolded him for leaving them, in Luke 2:49, “He said to them, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”
- xiv. Jesus was OPEN to God’s plan for his life...and wanted to know more!
- xv. Every time Jesus went away to pray, he was practicing being OPEN to the Father. Our mandate to have a life of openness to God is in the words of Jesus in Matthew 26 - “Not my will, but YOURS be done.”

## **B. MATTHEW 5**

- i. But not only did he mandate and model openness. Jesus TAUGHT us about being open as well. In Jesus’ most famous sermon, in Matthew chapter 5, he taught the disciples and all the people listening, to live a life of openness to God’s will.
- ii. In Matthew 5, we read a phrase that gives us a clue about what it takes to live a life of openness. The Phrase is, “You’ve heard it said, but I tell you...” We read this phrase in 5:21, 5:27, 5:31-32, 5:33, 5:38, and 5:43.

- iii. What Jesus is trying to teach his followers is this: “All your life you’ve operated in a way that’s been informed by YOUR actions, the actions of people around you, even what’s been taught to you. BUT...”, and from there, Jesus went on to teach them about GOD’S will, which goes directly against what they’d been taught and what they THOUGHT was true and appropriate.
- iv. Jesus was teaching them that the ways of God are greater and bigger and different than what their human nature tells them. And these were things like, “Love your enemies.” “Reconcile with people you’re mad at.” “Turn the other cheek when someone strikes you.” along with teachings on divorce, adultery, and other things that would-be disciples were facing.
- v. An openness to adjust our thinking to God’s will is at the heart of the gospel’s teachings. The gospel is all about changing us and our minds from OUR WILL AND WAY to GOD’S WILL AND WAY!
- vi. Jesus modeled that...and Jesus taught that. It’s a mandate and a vision for a life of openness.

### **3. Application**

- A. So how do you begin to live a more robust life of openness to God’s will?
- B. First, there has to be an acknowledgement that living a life of openness is of value. Many times, you and I are quite comfortable with the way we practice our faith. We love our church community, we come to worship, we find time for prayer, we serve in this ministry or that event.
- C. Yet, again, you and I sometimes close off parts of our lives to the Holy Spirit making changes. We don’t always like change. Change is difficult because you and I like what we like and do what we do.
- D. But what would it look like to open the door just a crack in some area of your life that seems like God has no part of?
- E. What would it look like to picture yourself with a set of doors in your chest, and, in your mind, opening those doors wide open to God?
- F. I didn’t have a basement growing up, but I go over to a friend’s house and they had these huge doors that opened to their basement from the outside. I think they’re called BILCO doors or bulkhead doors. They’re these massive metals doors that have two giant handles, and if you wanted to get into the basement from outside, you’d grab those handles and the heavy doors would creak and groan as you opened them wide. When fully opened, I feel like you could drive a small truck into the basement.

- G. What would it look like for you to have a set of BILCO doors in your heart that you opened up to God so that He could drive Himself into your life in a bigger way?
- H. The act of being open to God is the act of physically, spiritually, and willingly opening every aspect of your life to God's transforming power.
- I. And there are areas of your life that you aren't aware that God wants to change. Again, we like what we like and do what we do and don't always like change, or even think it's necessary, right?
- J. Jesus didn't necessarily want to open himself to the change that was coming after he was in the Garden...yet, he KNEW it was the way to something greater for you and me. And so he flung open the doors to the Father.
- K. We can be very comfortable with just enough Jesus - satisfied with devotional formulas and church meetings and events - which give us just enough of what Jesus is offering. That limits both our desire for and willingness to open ourselves wide open to the blinding and searing light of Jesus in our lives!
- L. You and I are being invited to grab the handles of the BILCO doors we've sometimes tried to keep shut to God, fling them open, and SHIFT gears to accelerate on the discipleship highway.
- M. To cultivate a life of openness that models Jesus' and learns what Jesus teaches, you and I make the shift from exploring to following to becoming to being centered on Jesus. Where are YOU in this progression? What gear are you in right now in your life of openness? Take out your HANDOUT to get some guidance and equipping in all this...
- N. The EXPLORING phase is where we all start.
  - i. This first gear is exciting because you feel drawn to the incredible story of God's love and you're beginning to explore the Bible.
  - ii. The door to your heart and life is just beginning to be cracked open. For some of us, God came in like a SWAT team breaking down the door of a drug house. For others, it was a gentle repeated knock that caused us to open the door a little.
  - iii. If you're not sure whether you're at this stage, ask yourself:
    - a. Do I feel the new desire to buy a bible, read it, hear sermons, and get to know more about this Jesus for the first time?
    - b. Am I amazed that what I've read before now seems to have new meaning or make sense when it didn't before?
  - iv. Team, this is the Holy Spirit at work in your life. There's a willingness. And don't ever discount your willingness to read, hear, and be awed by the things that Jesus is teaching you.

- v. If you're at this stage, get into a routine for worship and devotions. Keep praying, learning HOW to pray, and spend time just listening.
- vi. Pretty soon, you'll be clutching, shifting, and accelerating to phase 2...

O. FOLLOWING...

- i. This phase in the life of openness finds you standing at the door, wanting to invite Jesus in more and more.
- ii. You're developing a daily practice of prayer, Scripture and devotional reading. Maybe you've done some writing in a journal or talking with your spouse or friends about what you're reading.
- iii. Ask yourself:
  - a. Do I look forward to my prayer time and bible reading each day?
  - b. Do I kind of feel like I want a couple more devotionals to read?
- iv. If yes, then you're becoming more and more open to God.
- v. The challenge in this gear is to listen as much as you read and talk. God's will can be found in the words in the Bible, and through other people's devotionals, but God's will is most available through the Holy Spirit walking into your life of openness.

P. Then, in the BECOMING stage, the BILCO doors are now almost fully open and it gets really good.

- i. This is when the openness goes from something that's happening, to something that you're intentionally seeking to hear more of God's will.
- ii. To move from FOLLOWING to BECOMING, there MUST be a willingness to take responsibility for spiritual growth. And, it's not just about prayer, bible reading, and devotional time. A whole new world of spiritual disciplines are now on the table. These are things like fasting, solitude, different forms of prayer, Sabbath, meditation, journaling, retreats, and other disciplines.
- iii. The best book I've ever read on spiritual disciplines is from Richard Foster called Celebration of Discipline. Jesus is inviting you to start BECOMING like Him in these things.
- iv. Simple questions in this phase:
  - a. Am I excited to try some new disciplines in my life?
  - b. Do I feel like I'm steering this spiritual growth and want more?
- v. If so, then you're in third gear and ready for more.
- vi. God's will has become more important to you than what you think you want. And this has HUGE implications to your worldview, the ways you

spend you time and money, and the way you see others. Out of this deep desire to be laid bare before the Lord, you are learning things about yourself, other people, and God.

vii. And it's GOOD!

Q. Making the shift to being fully CENTERED on Christ is the top gear for disciples.

- i. In this gear, you find yourself seeking to be open to God's voice and blessings in all aspects of your life.
- ii. Don't miss that second part - not only is it being open to God's VOICE, but God's blessings.
- iii. When your life of openness is centered on Christ, there is a joy that comes from having nothing hidden to Him. There's a freedom that comes from rejecting temptation to NOT follow Jesus, and simply saying, "Your will be done."

#### **4. Conclusion**

- A. A life of openness is a life lived with all our senses - touch, smell, taste, sight, hearing. Those are the ways we learn...and change. We touch a hot stove when we're 4 and we remember that...and learn and grow. Smelling smoke heightens our awareness of danger, but smelling a rose reminds us of good things.
- B. God wants us to use all our senses to open ourselves to Him, so that through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, He can do the work of shining a light on the areas of growth.
- C. Psalm 139:23-24 gives us a picture of a life that's open to God's will. It says, "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.
- D. Just picture those big doors opening every time you stand in His presence...and then let Him have ALL of you today.
- E. Let's pray... Prayer for Openness: Jesus, you open us to new life, new hope, new possibilities. You conquer the way we close up, close down, and close in. Jesus, lover of us all, open our hearts to feel your compassion for people we would rather walk by; open our ears to hear the cries of the suffering deep inside where we cannot fail to be moved; open our understanding to new ways of living that do not diminish anyone; open our eyes to see a vision of this world as you would have it. May these prayerful words on our lips become the meditations of our hearts as we live in ways that are acceptable to you O God, our Rock and our Redeemer.