

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

Scripture: Matthew 6:19-24; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

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 sharing is opening everything you have to join Jesus in ministry.

1. Introduction

A. PRAY!

B. Today, we’re at the final milestone in this SHIFT series. We’ve passed the milestones of a life of Worship, a life of Community, a life of Openness, a life of Obeying, and a life of Serving.

C. This morning, we’re taking a look at the 6th aspect of our focus on intentional discipleship: Sharing (or Giving). This aspect of our faith lives has huge implications in our willingness to be an intentional follower of Jesus.

D. This isn’t a sermon about giving a certain amount or percentage of money to the church for the ministry we do. That’s an important PART of a life of sharing, but this last milestone in our series is about growing in a willingness to allow God to use EVERYTHING of value in your life...your time, your talents, your passions, and, yes, even your money.

E. Let’s take a look at a short video which will orient us to what we mean by giving or sharing...

F. VIDEO/AUDIO - *Through Giving*

G. When we’re in kindergarten, and even before, one of the first things we do is learn to share. It’s a painful thing when you’re 3 years old and you have something that you like and someone in authority over you asks you to share it with some other 3 year old. And we kind of throw a little fit sometimes when asked to share something. At 3, your world is small and you’re convinced that if you share, whatever you have will probably never be seen again. If we’re honest, no matter what our age, we still find ourselves sharing challenged.

H. It’s not until we learn that when we share, not only does the toy come back to us time after time, but that others are willing to share what THEY have.

I. As we grow, the lessons keep coming. We have to share with siblings, with roommates, with spouses, with parents, with our community...and, when we come to church, we read in the Bible that God expects us to share what we have with the church for ministry and with others to meet their needs. The lessons keep coming throughout life.

- J. Today, we're going to get some equipping for intentionally sharing what we have as a way to grow as followers of Jesus. We're ALL growing in this area.
- K. The Bible has more to say about giving, sharing, and being generous than any other topic. God knows us and knows that money and time and whatever we believe is a commodity, is of value to us.
- L. The goal in growing in a life of sharing is to raise the value of God's mission higher than the value of the commodity we have to share.
- M. If you're taking notes, here's our focus for today: **A life of sharing is opening everything you have to join Jesus in ministry.**
- N. Just like the other milestones, we find in the Bible a MANDATE and a VISION for a life of sharing. The MANDATE comes from Matthew chapter 6 and the VISION comes from 2 Corinthians 9.
- O. Let's start with the MANDATE. Open your bibles with me to Matthew 6 starting in verse 19.

2. Scripture

A. READ Matthew 6:19-24

- i. At first glance, these three short sections seem to be only loosely related. Let's take one at a time and then connect the dots.
- ii. Verses 19-21
 - a. The first section is about **treasure**. We all know what treasure is from the pirate movies we saw as kids, right? Treasure is all the gold coins we put into a creaky old wooden chest and bury in the sand on the beach, right? X marks the spot!
 - b. Not so much. Jesus said that whatever we put **value on** is our treasure. Money, time, things we have, things we make, careers, cars, etc.
 - c. When we were growing up, my mom would make desserts for church. When she was baking them, we'd whine and beg, "Is that for us or is it going to church?" "To church," she would proclaim. See, we put value on the dessert...and we weren't super-thrilled about it going to church instead of in our stomachs. We wanted it for ourselves.
 - d. But Jesus said, "...don't store up for YOURSELF treasures on earth." On earth, rust and moths and mold and decay and all that stuff, will break it down over time. Instead, store up things of eternal value - which he called storing treasures in heaven.
 - e. The implication here is that the things we can't see or touch are of more value to God and to us than the money we keep, the time we hoard, the cake we save for ourselves, or the anything that can be stolen.

- f. Instead, give the things of earthly value away so that you can meet someone's need, build up the church that God has established, support a youth going to camp or a mission trip to learn about the world, be part of a mission team that is going out to love others and tell them about Jesus.
- g. The impact of the earthly things being given, which will rust or get stolen if not given away, will be like treasures in heaven, with eternal value... and God sees the generosity.

iii. Verses 22-23

- a. The next two verses talk about a person's eyes. In the ancient world, people believed that sight worked, not by light coming INTO the eye, but by light going OUT FROM the eye, hitting an object, like this podium, and that's how you could see it. The eye illuminated the object.
- b. Jesus was asking the disciples to see RIGHTLY the physical, tangible things in their lives. To rightly illuminate the things of value. Whatever VIEW they had was an indication of the darkness or lightness of their hearts and life (represented by their whole body). Basically, if they saw treasure in a selfish, scarce way, then their whole lives would be dark... focused on the here and now...of what I need to keep and not share.
- c. But, if they saw their treasure in God's terms - with God's eyes of light coming from them - then their whole lives would be healthy and eternally-focused.
- d. So, we store up treasure in heaven because we've looked at our stuff with God's eyes...

iv. Verse 24

- a. Then, in verse 24, Jesus finally just says, "Look, you can only have one god or master. You can only be a slave to one master. Either you serve God or you serve your wealth." Some translations say MONEY. The implication is that we are drawn to build and store up money as our life's focus, seeing with dark eyes the short-term value of it, OR we can see with God's eyes, build wealth, and use it to serve God, which builds up treasures in heaven, which will NEVER be destroyed.
- b. I don't know about you, but if I'm going to work hard, make money, and intentionally follow Jesus, then I want my money and time to be used for stuff that will NEVER fade or be eaten up! I want what I do to have eternal value to God.
- c. No one checks their bank balance on their deathbed. They look for the people whose lives they touched and who touched them.

- v. Our MANDATE for a Life of Sharing is to give with eternal purposes in mind...to take a new look at what we value, find ways to share that with others and the church in ministry, and then join Jesus in sharing ourselves.
- vi. That's what Jesus was asking the disciples to grow into. Jesus led the way when he shared everything he had for humanity. He shared his prayers. He shared his knowledge. He shared his love. He shared even his life for us, giving it willingly so that we could join Him in ministry through sharing.
- vii. But what does it look like for us to join Jesus in this? Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 9, starting in verse 6. The early church was learning how to grow in a life of sharing...and the Apostle Paul gave them some encouragement. This is good stuff for us today, too...

B. READ 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

- i. There are a WHOLE bunch of commands, lessons, and visions for the church in this passage.
- ii. Paul was thanking the church in Corinth here because they had promised to be generous in their offerings to help the believers in Jerusalem. And they were waiting on Paul to tell them when. Paul said, "Now's the time!"
- iii. He then went on to give them the VISION of what it looks like for people in a church to give generously for the ministry of the church, for others in other ministries, and for those in need in the community.
- iv. Paul's message was pretty clear: if you're generous in this, church, testing God in His faithfulness to meet YOUR needs, you will not only bless the church and community, but you will see God's blessings more clearly in YOUR life. And this isn't some health and wealth gospel garbage. This is God saying, "Try me!"
- v. Stacy and I have grown into our life of sharing over the years. When we first got married, we didn't have a full sense of what God was asking us to share because no one ever really told us to give sacrificially. I sensed my parents were generous with the church, but we never talked about it. As far as OUR giving to the church, specifically, we gave what we thought we could. Over the years, that's gone from 2% to 5% to 10% of our net income. Then it was over 10% of our net income. Now, because of the Centerpoint campaign, we've moved to 10% of our gross income. At the time, we thought, "This is NUTS!" But, let me tell you, our testimony is that EVERY NEED is met, EVERY TIME, and we have more than we need. It blows me away every day. And it's all because we not only took that risk, but we trust that God will continue to meet EVERY NEED, EVERY TIME. And we KNOW that others are being served and loved because of our struggle to grow in this life of sharing. And it's not just our money, but

time, and passions, and prayers, and our lives. Stacy is way better at this than I am...she's a servant who shares whatever she has...for God's glory.

vi. Indeed, Paul didn't stop at, "God will meet your needs in abundance when you trust Him and share what you have." That's true...but what he THEN said was, "...and when that happens, the incredible, saving, gospel message about Jesus Christ will continue to move out into the world!"

C. Growing in a Life of Sharing means widening our understanding that when we generously give away what we have, in the NAME OF JESUS, God gets the glory for the work Jesus is doing in the world through you and me...AND, God can and will bless us by meeting every need, every time.

D. The VISION is that the church can do what God is calling us to do. The VISION is that people's needs are being met AND they are hearing this incredible news about Jesus. The VISION is that we're doing this together for God's glory and we're laying it ALL down for the vision that every person in our community has the opportunity to believe in and follow Jesus.

E. A life of sharing is opening everything you have to join Jesus in ministry.

3. Application

A. Where are YOU in your life of sharing?

B. Maybe this concept of giving is new to you...to your family. Maybe you've been giving for a long time, and you KNOW that what Jesus and Paul are saying is some of the most rock-solid words in scripture and in your life.

C. None of us come out of the womb with the desire to share what we have. In fact, we have to grow in this area of our faith life.

D. Yet, as you move from exploring what sharing means...to being centered on Jesus in your life of sharing, you'll wonder why you didn't take the risk to trust God in this sooner.

E. Let's see if we can get some equipping here...and each of us can do some self-reflection about where we are in a life of sharing our time, money, skills, passions, knowledge...all of you. And we'll focus on money and time here, because those are the two major ways we share, although there are others.

F. The first stage is the EXPLORING STAGE (we should have these memorized by now, right?)

i. In this stage, sharing is something you do when you attend worship. You give your time to be here and you give some in the offering plate when it's passed.

ii. At this stage, you're not sure what the expectations are, if any, and you're just doing what you see other people are doing.

- iii. If you're at this stage, you may not know what to give or how to give, since it's not something that gets talked about. You decide to give by determining how much you think you want to give or how much free time you have without a conflict of any sort.
 - iv. I love this stage because I just know that God is ready to do something amazing in your life.
 - v. Questions you might be asking are:
 - a. When the offering plate slides by, what am I supposed to be giving?
 - b. How much time do I have to share with someone before, during, and after worship on Sunday?
 - vi. Keep asking those questions. Find someone to talk with about it. But don't ignore the promptings of the Holy Spirit in this.
 - vii. Sharing may seem painful at this point, really. Hear the words of scripture that say, "God loves a cheerful giver..." so whatever time or money you decide to give, give it with JOY.
- G. Pretty soon, you'll be moving to the FOLLOWING stage.
- i. In this stage, this second gear, if you will, you've asked some questions, and begun to give more of what's of value to you more and more regularly and generously.
 - ii. In this gear, you're beginning to re-orient your sharing to raise it higher than it used to be. You've become comfortable with whatever level you're sharing because it seems good, and you continue to give time and money cheerfully. You want to.
 - iii. At this stage, you may be asking yourself:
 - a. I wonder how I can give online to be more regular even when I can't be in worship?
 - b. If I could move a few things around in my schedule, is there somewhere I could serve on Sunday or during the week?
 - iv. Explore some more. Begin taking others' leads.
 - v. At this stage of growth in a life of sharing, I know that you're starting to see some unexpected blessings come into your life...and you see needs being met and you're excited about that.
 - vi. There's a sense of gratitude at this stage that you haven't felt before.
 - vii. The next stage is where sharing starts to take on a life of its own.
- H. The BECOMING stage is where you start to become an intentional disciple.
- i. At this stage, you're driving the bus and making some exciting decisions.

- ii. The first decision is that you've started tithing your income. A simple calculation of 10%. AND...AND, you're starting to wonder if the remaining 90% can be used in a way that ALSO has the focus of sharing - what you buy, from where, who is benefitted, how is it invested?
- iii. With your time, you start to say, as a good friend has said, "If I have to decide between learning ABOUT ministry and DOING ministry, I'll choose DOING ministry every time." Serving becomes second nature.
- iv. You're questions tend to be things like:
 - a. Now that we're tithing, what others needs are out there?
 - b. If I have some spare time, how can I use that at church or in the community? What knowledge can I share with someone?
- I. The last phase is being CENTERED in Christ as you share.
 - i. This phase is a full-time job of doing everything you can to free up time and money to give away.
 - ii. You are tithing plus more, and you're consciously reordering your life to share more to honor God, meet needs, and bless others.
 - iii. It's at this stage that you begin to forget about the value of the money or time, and are laser-focused on the value of God's work and Jesus' message of hope and salvation for the church, community and world.

4. Conclusion

- A. Kindergarteners have the advantage of having all things in front of them to learn and grow. Like them, God wants to experience sharing with us.
- B. Imagine a church where sharing was at the heart of how we approach every meeting, every worship service, every project and outreach.
- C. Growing in a life of sharing means opening everything we have to join Jesus in ministry.
- D. God's thing - God's mission - goes from here (low) to here (high) and we share everything we have to keep it there.
- E. Share generously this week, of all you have. Take one step up, from where you are now in your sharing to where God is calling you share. Take one extra minute to listen to someone or get to know them.
- F. Life's too short not to...and too amazing with Jesus to stay where we are.
- G. Next week, we'll begin to cast the vision for what this SHIFT looks like as we launch this into our ministry teams, our mission, our classes, our serving teams, our prayer teams, and into every aspect of the church and community.
- H. Let's be generous together today...Let's pray...