

SHIFTING GEARS

Series: Good God
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Adam Mosley
Transition, Calm, Anticipation
Acts 1:1-11, John 21 :15-19

There are a lot of things to love about living in Kenya. The people, the culture, the weather. But one of the things I love about being here is actually quite frivolous. It's my truck.

You see, I'm a bit of a car guy. I've always loved cool cars. I talked a couple of weeks ago about my brief and rocky love affair with a 1965 Ford Mustang. But I'm a car guy without a car guy income. If I was filthy rich (and lived in a place with smooth roads) I would probably have a charcoal grey Aston Martin Vanquish in my garage.

But I'm not rich and I *don't* live in a place with smooth roads, so I have something else. I call it the Great White - 2005 Land Rover Defender 110 - the perfect vehicle for African travel. It's rough and clunky and big and loud. It will climb hills, wade through water, slog through mud, and at the end of the day, you can just hose it down, inside and out, and it's ready for your next journey.

I love my truck - the simplicity of it, without all the bells and whistles; the gruffness; the gurgle of the diesel engine. But the thing is *very* loud. I can't sneak up on anybody. When I come home from town, my dog and my two girls hear me coming from a kilometer away and come running to greet me. A single rev of the engine is just as effective as the horn at causing people to move out of my way. It's noisy.

But even my big, loud, boisterous truck has it's moments of calm. Even the Great White is sometimes tame. In the midst of all the noise, there are moments when, out of pure necessity, the beast has to breath. Why? Because I have to change gears.

No matter how big and burly a vehicle is - no matter how noisy and intimidating - every vehicle has to change gears. And in order to change gears, you have to lift off the accelerator and depress the clutch. And when you do that, this moment of calm comes over the vehicle.

It's especially noticeable in the great white. Because the engine is so loud, depressing the clutch elicits a palpable quiet in the cabin - a moment of calm between gears. There was madness before and there will be madness again, but in that clutch moment, there is calm. There is peace. In that brief moment, filled with anticipation and potential, there is a breath... and then the powerful engine roars once again - sending us hurtling toward our destination.

We have these clutch moments in life, too - these times of transition where we try to catch our breath after the chaos, turmoil and/or excitement behind us, as we prepare to transition to whatever lies ahead. Sometimes we're tempted to blow through those moments of calm - to resist them. But when, instead, we engage deeply in them, what we find is a much-needed reprieve - one that is designed into our being just as the clutch is designed into my truck. It's supposed to be this way.

Today, as we continue our Good God series, I want to look at what is perhaps the most significant clutch moment in the history of humanity and of the church. And I want to consider how we might be able to use it as a model for our own transitions in life. I've called this talk "Shifting Gears."

Let's pray that God will open our eyes, ears, and hearts to what he has for us this morning.

Prayer

Over the past few weeks, we've been talking about this defining moment in the history of God and his people. It began with the events that led up to Jesus' death, then continued with his resurrection, then his appearance to some of his followers - including some instructions he left with them - and then, eventually, to what we call his ascension - this moment when his body left the earth for good.

And we've been talking about these things because I think it's good to linger a bit around this time. So often, even within the church, we celebrate Easter - celebrate the resurrection of Jesus - and then kind of get on with life. But that's not what happened back in the first century. That's not how Jesus' followers experienced it.

We're going to be reading today from the book of Acts or *The Acts of the Apostles*, which is a book written by a guy named Luke - the same guy who wrote the *Gospel of Luke* in our bibles. Last week, we read the very end of the book of Luke, which went like this - Luke 24, starting in verse 50:

When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

Luke 24:50-53

That's the condensed version. Then, we jump to Luke's second book, the book of Acts, and he begins his sequel with a recap of previous events. "Previously on *Luke*." At the very beginning of the book of Acts, he says this:

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

Acts 1:1-9

Luke literally begins this book by recapping the end of his first book. He says, "Here's what I wrote about before. Remember?"

Now, one question you might be asking is, "Who in the world is Theophilus?" Well, we don't really know. He might have been a real person - there are some theories that he was a religious leader or a lawyer. Another theory says that Theophilus may not have been a person at all. The word itself means "friend of God," and as such, some scholars wonder if perhaps this was Luke's way of addressing the church at large. It might have been a way for Luke to personally address the entire church.

I actually like this idea, because it means that Luke wrote this not just for some guy who lived 2000 years ago, but that he actually wrote it for *me* and for *you*. He has addressed it to us, friends of God: Theophilus.

And he recaps what he wrote about previously, but he adds some detail.

Here, we read that Jesus appeared to the disciples over a period of 40 days after his resurrection. It doesn't seem like he was with them the whole 40 days, but that he would sort of come and go. And we read this in the other biblical accounts, too. The disciples would be out and about or they would be gathered in a room, and Jesus would just show up.

This happened for 40 days. For 40 days, these guys could never be quite sure when or where Jesus would show up. But when he did, Luke says that Jesus taught them, he gave them instructions, and he spoke about the Kingdom of God - this interesting realm that is

both a place here and now, and something in the future. This is the stuff Jesus wanted his guys to understand.

Then, he gave them this really important instruction - so important that it is recorded in both of Luke's books. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus tells them, "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

In Acts, he says, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

This is an important. He gives teaches them, gives them instructions about all that they should do after he's gone. He's leaving these guys in charge of spreading the good news about him to the world, but rather than instructing them and sending them on their way, he says, "Wait here. I've got something for you. After I'm gone, just wait until God empowers you - until you receive something from the Holy Spirit." Jesus, though he wouldn't have used the metaphor, is saying, "We're about to shift gears here, but first, you need to depress the clutch."

And that's just what happens.

Starting in verse 9:

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

Acts 1:9-11

It's been a crazy six weeks for these guys. They had this crazy entry into Jerusalem where people were praising Jesus as he rode in on a donkey. Then, in just a few days, Jesus was arrested, tried, tortured, and killed. Then he came back from the dead and started appearing and disappearing all over the place, giving instructions to people. He talked about this helper, this power from on high that they were supposed to wait for. Then he disappeared again - but there was something different about it this time. They could tell he wasn't coming back.

And they just stood there looking up into the sky. Regardless of all of Jesus' instructions, you get the sense that these guys had no clue what to do next. They were shocked. Their heads

were spinning from the events of the previous weeks. They had been put in charge of essentially starting a new global church, and they had no idea what to do.

Then these two guys dressed in white (presumably angels of some kind) show up next to them. They're all looking up into the sky, and these two guys are kind of just suddenly standing there with them, like, "Hey, whatcha lookin' at? You know, Jesus left. He'll be back." And it's almost like this moment where these angel guys are shifting the gear for the disciples. You know, the action that must be taken in the midst of the clutch moment. The gear must be shifted. And when it is, not much seems to be happening, but in reality, something every important is taking place. What these two guys are saying, essentially, is, "Jesus did his part. Now it's your turn."

The disciples would have another week and a half for that to sink in. Another week and a half of clutch. A week and a half more of that calm between the powerful roars of the engine. And they would do just what Jesus had asked them to do. They would wait. They would embrace that breath, while anticipating what was to come.

Next week, we'll talk about what happened when God re-engaged the gear and put his foot down on the accelerator, but for now, I want to just think about this clutch moment - this calm in the midst of the storm. What happens in these moments?

Well, one thing that happens is we receive instructions. In the clutch moments, we receive critical instructions that inform our actions once we re-engage.

Think about your own clutch moments - those times of transition in your life. I know for me, there is a time just before any transition where I seem to be really receptive to any wisdom anyone can offer. I read more books in those clutch moments. I seek out more advice during those clutch moments. Do you do that?

Sometimes that's driven by anxiety - like, I have no idea what I'm doing, so I'll take all the help I can get. And sometimes, it's something else - a desire for instruction before letting up on the clutch and heading off in a new direction.

This is what happened to the disciples. They received all this instruction from Jesus - not like, "Go do this right now," but more like, "Here's what gear you're going to be in for a while."

And these instructional times are important, because once we get in the throws of whatever's next, we might not have the time, energy, or desire to receive a bunch of instructions. This is one of the reasons I think clutch moments are so important. We have this time of calm where we can sort of take in instruction and file it away to be recalled at a later date.

You know, I can't shift my truck into 3rd gear while I'm accelerating. I have to shift - I have to give the vehicle that instruction *prior* to accelerating - because once it's go time, it's go time.

So, we receive instruction during these clutch moments.

We also experience rest.

Rest is crucial to anything you do in life. We human beings simply aren't made to run full-tilt all the time. And we're reminded of this every night, aren't we? Think about it - human beings, the most complex organisms on the planet, have to be completely shut down every 24 hours. Not only do we need to recharge, but we have to be completely offline in order to do it. Rest is critical for our survival.

And even though we are sort of forced into this rest cycle each day, we sometimes forget that we actually need *other* kinds of rest as well. Depending on your personality, you might be the kind of person who *hates* rest. You just *have* to be doing something. Or, you might feel *guilty* about resting - like every moment you aren't working, you feel guilty for not accomplishing something with your life.

And yet, we're told time and time again throughout the bible that God designed us in a way that requires us to rest not only in order to be at peak efficiency, but to survive at all.

Here's the bold truth: if you don't rest, you'll die. If you don't rest, you'll burn out. If you don't rest, whatever your greatest hopes and dreams are will eventually fade away, because you simply won't have the physical or mental energy to sustain them.

Not only that, but you'll eventually stop making the progress you hoped to make.

You know, I could drive my truck for a while in first gear, but it wouldn't be a good idea. Driving from my house into town in first gear would be the noisiest, slowest, most taxing way to drive into town. If I refused to engage the clutch - to embrace the calm moments of transition - I could probably make it to town, but it wouldn't be the best way. And if I drove around in first gear all the time, I would eventually ruin the truck. It would overheat, the engine would cease, the gearbox would stop working.

Rest is essential. Clutch moments are crucial. For my truck *and* for my life. If you want to shift your life into the next gear - to propel your mission and vision forward - you have to start with the clutch.

Lastly, during these clutch moments, we're instilled with confidence for the road ahead. When I shift gears in my truck, there's something more there than just sending instructions

to the gear box. There's something that happens in the solid lock of that gear shift into the chosen gear - something that says, "Yes, this is where things belong. This is where we're going."

That's what happened to the disciples during their clutch moment. In the book of John, chapter 21, some of the guys decide to go fishing - maybe they wanted some food, maybe they were looking to return to their old vocation, or maybe being on the water was the way they hoped to process all that had gone on. Whatever the case, this is after Jesus had initially appeared to them post-resurrection - this is during their clutch moment.

So, they go out in a boat to fish, and here's what happens - John 21, starting in verse 4:

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?"

"No," they answered.

He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

[Jump to verse 9]

When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast."

[Jump to verse 15]

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this

to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

Now, there's a lot going on here that I don't have time to unpack, but consider what is happening here for Peter. First off, we have to understand that Peter was a guy who, in the throws of chaos before Jesus' death, had denied even knowing Jesus. And I'm sure he still felt the guilt of that moment as he sat and talked with Jesus.

And Jesus says, "Do you love me?" He asks the question three times. Three times Peter confirms that he does love Jesus. And three times Jesus basically gives him the same instructions - feed my lambs. In other words, Jesus says, "If you love me, this is how you show it." And hearing it three times, even though Peter might have been a little frustrated, I'm sure that left Peter with confidence in his path forward.

You see, Peter was a fiery guy. There might have been a lot of potential plans being hatched in Peter regarding what he was going to do next. But Jesus comes along and not only gives him instructions, but does so in a way that instills confidence in Peter. He says, "Here's what you are to do."

And Jesus doesn't say, "If you love me, exact revenge on my enemies," which Peter may have wanted to do. He doesn't say, "If you love me, go into politics." He says, "If you love me, Peter, feed my lambs." In other words, take care of the people who are coming into this new church - teach them, help them, encourage them. He defines Peter's new vocation in a way that will cause Peter to walk with a new sense of confidence in his calling.

As you read on in the book of Acts, you see, time and time again, Peter being the first to stand up and address a crowd. He's confident in his role in the formation of this new church. And he received that confidence during this clutch moment - he was instilled with confidence during this time, which he would tap into later when things started getting crazy.

That's the way it works.

You know, when we began making the transition to Kenya from the U.S., we very much had a clutch moment. For the last few months in the U.S., it felt like we weren't really doing *anything*. And yet, when I look back, I see that that was a critical time in our transition.

We received a lot of really helpful instruction, some from people here in Nakuru, some from people who had lived cross-culturally for years, from people who had pastored international churches, from wise friends.

We also experienced some necessary rest between the time we wrapped up responsibilities at our former church and the time that we moved. We got to spend time together as a family,

Melody and I got a little time away as a couple. It was a time of rest and refreshing, even as we anticipated shifting to the next gear.

But perhaps the most enduring thing that happened during that clutch moment was that we seemed to be continually instilled with confidence from God. Turn after turn after turn, God made it abundantly clear that he was not only sending us here, but that he was going ahead of us to open doors, facilitate relationships, even provide things like a house and a great white truck.

And on the difficult days, we have the ability to look back to that clutch moment, and to say, without a doubt, that God is up to something here. Like Peter confidently striding into the birth of a church in Jerusalem in the first century, we can do the same here in Nakuru, because we've been instilled with that confidence from God - not that we have it all figured out, but that he has called us, equipped us, and is walking with us.

The clutch moments in our lives are crucial to whatever it is God has *next*.

What about your clutch moments? Thinking back, can you remember them? Can you think of a time when all you wanted to do was to accelerate into the next phase of your career, your life, your ministry, your marriage...whatever. But instead, you were forced to wait, to rest, to lift your foot off the accelerator? Did you recognize that time for what it was, or did you try your best to keep going full speed ahead?

Maybe you're in one of those moments in your life right now. They can be tough. Sometimes, it feels like God has depressed the clutch, but not yet given us instructions - the gear shift hasn't moved, but we're slowing down, just trying to figure out what God is doing.

If you're in that situation today, let me offer this. First, embrace this clutch moment. Receive instruction - even if it isn't specific instruction about the next phase of your life. Experience rest in this moment, rather than anxiety. And ask God to open your eyes to the ways in which he is preparing you for what's to come - how he is instilling confidence in you for the next leg of your journey. So, embrace this moment for what it is.

Second, come up and receive prayer. Open yourself up to the fact that God may have something to say to you right here, right now. Be willing to take that step of allowing someone to pray for you.

For some of you, you aren't in a clutch moment at all. Maybe you're just in first gear, struggling up a muddy, rocky hill, and your right foot is on the floor just to keep moving. Or, maybe you're cruising! You're on the highway to the coast and the wind is blowing in your hair. Whatever your situation, know this - the clutch is still there. It will be there when you need it.

Eventually, this season of your life - whatever season you're in - will end, and you will transition to something else. When you do, lean into that clutch! Use it! Take advantage of that clutch moment. Don't just try to get it over with as quickly as possible. You need it. You were designed to have those moments in your life...a breath...before dropping the hammer and powering down the road again.

Let's pray.

Prayer

We're going to close today with a time of personal response. And there several ways to respond:

1. Singing

We're going to sing some songs together that help us reflect on some of these things.

While that singing is taking place, you will also have the opportunity for prayer.

2. Prayer

If you need prayer for anything at all, we have people here who are eager to do that.

Also, while that is going on, you'll have a chance to take communion

3. Communion

Communion is a symbolic act, instituted by Jesus as a way for us to remember the way he willingly died for us. The unleavened bread serves as a symbol of Jesus' body broken on the cross. The wine or juice symbolize his blood that was spilled for us.

We have people ready to serve you communion. Juice is on your left, wine is on your right. Feel free to partake of either, as it fits with your tradition. Just break off a piece of the bread, dip it in the cup, and eat.

We offer communion each week for *anyone* who wants to take it. There's no membership requirement or hoops to jump through. You are guests at this symbolic table of Jesus, so please feel free to partake.

4. Giving

Lastly, during this time, you will have an opportunity to give financially to the work of this church. If you're a guest with us today, we don't expect you to give anything. However, for those who consider this your church home, and for those who believe in what we're trying to

do here, this is our chance to give back to God a portion of what he has given us, and to support the work he has called this church to in Nakuru.

There is a tall box at the back with a slot in it. You can place your gifts in that box at any time as we are singing together.

So those are the four ways to respond: Singing, Prayer, Communion, and Giving. All will be happening simultaneously. There's no order you have to do them in. You don't have to do them all. You don't have to do any of them. This is your time to respond in whatever way you desire.

At the end of that time, I'll pray a prayer of blessing over you before you go.

Closing Prayer