

# Coming in Clutch: Session Handout

# COMING IN CLUTCH: THE ART OF THE SHIFT

## 01. The Manual Mandate

Galatians 6:9 – “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

- Concept: Life is a Manual, Not an \_\_\_\_\_ .
- Principle: God doesn't just put us in 'Drive'; He invites us to engage the pedals.
- Diagnostic: Am I just 'riding' and waiting for the destination to 'happen,' or am I actively working the pedals of this transition?

---

- Ministry Application: Are you relying solely on past methods, or are you actively working the clutch to match the current ground?

---

- Family Application: Are you treating family time as an automatic 'extra,' or is it the first gear that provides torque for your life?

---

---

Notes:

---

---

## 02. Timing: Finding the 'Biting Point'

Proverbs 20:5 – “The purposes of a person’s heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out.”

- **Concept: Observation Precedes Acceleration.**
- **Principle: Sensitivity and Timing.** You must find the cultural friction point before applying the gas.
- **Diagnostic: Do I know where the 'clutch' of this community naturally engages? What moves this environment without me forcing it?**

---

- **Ministry Application: Find the existing momentum. What is naturally pulling this culture forward (a program, a person, a passion)? Respect it before attempting to accelerate.**

---

---

- **Family Application: Are you trying to 'force' a new schedule or change (gas), or have you found where everyone (spouse, kids) naturally bites in?**

---

---

Notes:

---

---

---

---

### 03. Purpose in Every Gear

**Ecclesiastes 3:1** – “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.”

- **Concept:** Matching Gear to Terrain.
- **Principle:** Stewardship of Momentum. Low torque seasons (Harlem) have high power for heavy lifting; high speed seasons (Malaga) require precise stewardship.
- **Diagnostic:** Have I spent enough time in the 'slow' spaces of my current gear to appreciate what can truly propel me forward?

---

---

- **Ministry Application:** If you are in a raw start (1st gear), focus on persistence and presence, not speed. If you are handling a legacy (5th gear), focus on stewardship and systems.

---

---

- **Family Application:** Are you trying to 'race' to the next phase of life or ministry while missing the unique, essential purpose of this slow gear (e.g., small children, moving cities)?

---

---

Notes:

---

---

---

---

**04. The Incline Start: Anchors**

**Hebrews 6:19** – “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”

- **Concept: Resilience on the Steep Hill.**
- **Principle: Utilizing Stability.** When a crisis stops you, the E-Brake is an asset, not a failure. It holds you steady while you find your footing.
- **Diagnostic: When I experience a screeching halt, what is my anchor (E-Brake)? Do I pull it to find rest and stability while preparing to move again?**

---

---

- **Ministry Application: In a crisis (unexpected departure, building stall), don't panic. Pull the 'E-Brake' (wise counsel, prayer, core leaders) to stabilize the system.**

---

---

- **Family Application: When your family faces a screeching stop (illness, diagnosis), the family dinner, scripture, and rest are the E-Brakes that hold you together.**

---

---

**Notes:**

---

---

---

---

---

## 05. Downshifting & Offloading

**Philippians 2:3** – “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.”

- **Concept:** Sustainable Momentum on the Descent.
  - **Principle:** Systems and Delegation. Downshifting is not braking (stopping motion due to fear). It is offloading the engine's power (perspective/delegation) to others to maintain control.
  - **Diagnostic:** Am I trying to 'brake' (handle everything myself) during difficult descents? What gears (systems/teams) am I using to offload the engine?
- 
- 

- **Ministry Application:** To prevent burnout when things go 'downhill,' build systems and teams. Passing the vision (engine) to others keeps the momentum when you cannot.
  - **Family Application:** Are you, as the parent/spouse, trying to 'brake' every stressful family descent, or have you built a team where responsibilities (the load) can be shared and offloaded?
- 
- 

Notes:

---

---

---

---

## Dashboard Checklist (Post-Session Audit)

- WHICH GEAR AM I RUNNING IN? (Identify your current context: Raw start, healthy momentum, or systems stewardship.)

Notes:

---

---

- AM I 'RIDING THE CLUTCH'? (Am I half-in, half-out, creating destructive friction/burnout?)

---

---

- IS MY ENGINE REVVING? (Making noise but minimal forward motion?)

---

---

- DO I NEED TO PULL THE E-BRAKE? (Is it time for a "Holy Pause" or counsel to hold me steady?)

---

---

- HAVE I FOUND THE "BITE"? (What moves this culture on its own power?)

---

---

Notes:

---

---

## Resources

### Comedians

- John B Crist
- Michael Junior

### Cultural Commentators

- Ruslan KD
- **What Do You Meme** (John McCray)

### Podcast

- **Abdu Murray** – *All Rise*

Theology Matters - Doug Clay & Dr. Allen Tennison

# Coming in Clutch: The Art of the Shift

# Coming in Clutch: The Art of the Shift

## 1. Introduction:

- **OPENER:** Life isn't an automatic. It's a manual. God doesn't just put us in 'Drive' and let us sit in the passenger seat; He invites us to work the pedals of our calling. Every transition—from a new assignment to a new city—is a shift.
- **THE PREMISE:** When ministry gets difficult—like trying to climb a steep hill—the fear of rolling backward can be paralyzing. Whether you're grinding gears in a new role or stuck on an incline in an old one, mastering the mechanics of transition is key to finding your power.
- **PERSONAL NARRATIVE & CREDIBILITY:** Today my wife Erica and I are lead pastors of Van Nest Assembly, a church that was founded in 1934 and has been led by three incredible men before us, most recently Pastor David Hernquist. We've been there for two years now. We landed back in NYC and stepped into a long-standing church that was in the middle of a significant shift and building project. It felt like jumping out of a plane with no parachute, landing onto a moving train while drinking from a fire hose... Did I mention we have two little boys under the age of 4?
  - One thing I can guarantee you is that **NO ONE** likes change, yet in the midst of shifting gears, there's always the opportunity to excel!
  - My journey didn't start in a pastor's office. It began as the son of immigrants in public housing in East Harlem. Over the course of my childhood and adolescence, I went to 11 schools in 12 years between NY and Northern VA. After college, my career had me moving from retail store to retail store until I finally landed in the corporate office as a marketing assistant. Yet, God had other plans, and He'd take my wife and me to be missionaries in Cuba and then later Spain, where our two little guys were born.
  - What I am here to share today are certain key principles I've come to learn in the process. I by no means profess to be an expert or have all of these things figured out, yet I do believe there's worth in the journey I've been on and hope to add value to each of you present here today.
- **THE METAPHOR:** Buckle up—we're going for a drive. As Christ often shared parables, I want to use the imagery of driving a manual (clutch, stick shift) vehicle for this.

## 2. TIMING! (The Biting Point)

- **THE TECHNIQUE:** I've learned that the first thing to do when you rent a stick shift car is, once you turn it on, put it in first gear, get your foot on the clutch, and see where it "catches." Don't give it any gas. Just play with it for a second and find where it bites. If you don't put it in far enough, the car stalls and shuts off; if you give it too much gas, you make a lot of noise and rev the engine but ultimately won't go very far... Timing.
  - **THE ENGAGEMENT:** Once you see where the clutch bites, you begin to roll without doing much else—just like you would in an automatic.
  - **MINISTRY APPLICATION:** Transitions in life are very similar—you have to find the biting point. Maybe you want to shift the culture at your church, or maybe you're like me and you're the new pastor. Where do people "bite in"? Find that moment before you accelerate.
  - **FAMILY APPLICATION:** This works even in your family (Lord knows I've stalled out a few times here), but even with your spouse. Change is coming; make sure you're both biting the same thing at the same time, or else, just like a revving car, a lot of noise (marital arguments) can ensue.
  - **THE KEY:** What's the biting point? That is the level of interest and connection.
- 

## 3. Every Gear

**THE SCENARIO:** If you drive stick, I've done it, you've done it—you may want to start the car in second gear. Sure, technically you can. The clutch can do it; it just bites a bit differently, but you have to make sure to give it more gas. It takes practice and timing, but ultimately it is not ideal for the fuel efficiency manual cars boast, or even for your transmission.

- **THE POINT:** In change and transitions, don't be in a rush to get to the next thing. Each gear, each phase, each moment has its purpose. Lean into it and embrace it.
  - **UNDERESTIMATING THE SLOW SPACE:** You may think 1st gear serves no purpose and "I don't need it," so you never truly learn how to engage it... Until you're at a light on a steep hill and have the fear of rolling backward and realize 1st gear is the only way to get out of here. But if you've never spent time in that "slow" space to appreciate its power, you underestimate what can truly propel you forward.
  - **CONTROL THE CONTROLLABLES:** In seasons of change, control the controllables and find the things you can slow down. Maybe it's less time in the office or on your phone, and more time with the family. Maybe it's less time searching for the next thing and just embracing what is. Let's be honest, during seasons of transitions we feel pulled in so many directions that we forget 1st gear—we treat our devotional times as that indispensable first gear and think, "I don't need it; I can just go onto the next thing."
-

## 4. Incline Start (Anchors)

THE SCENARIO: I alluded to it already, but let's go there for a second. If you've never experienced it, you've seen it in a movie. You're on a steep hill at a red light or stuck in traffic and at a dead stop. You were already on the road, driving, maybe even cruising, but out of nowhere things come to a screeching halt and you're on a steep hill no less.

- **THE TRAGIC PHONE CALL:** This happens in life. Ministry is going good, work is going good, everything is firing on all cylinders, and then the tragic phone call or the diagnosis from the doctor. Something happens that stops you right in your tracks and has you feeling small in the face of this steep hill right before you. But we can't stay there forever, and we have to move forward. So what do we do? How do we move on from here?
- **THE EBRAKE:** There's this beautiful thing called an E-Brake. And you pull it to sustain you; with it, your car won't move and you can find rest.
- **THE QUESTION:** In those seasons, moments of screeching halts and steep hills, what are your anchors—your E-Brakes—and how do you engage with them to keep you from rolling backward and ultimately work with them for when the time is right to keep moving forward?
- **THE TECHNIQUE:** The trick is, you pull onto that E-Brake, you engage the clutch, and you time just right the release of that brake as you *de-clutch* (let the clutch pedal out) and give gas at the same time. You time it right, no rolling backward. You get it wrong, you stall on a hill and roll backward.
- **THE TAKEAWAY:** But even in those moments of stress, rushing and getting it wrong could prove more costly than slowing down to focus on getting it right.

---

## 5. Downshifting

THE SCENARIO: Things are going great. You're cruising on the highway or coastal road, windows open, bass is thumping—it's a good time. Then a curve comes, and a descent. You've been here before. It's a road you've driven—maybe it's that time of year in which things go "downhill."

- **THE REFRAMING:** Too many times we say things like, "Well, it's all downhill from here," yet I've come to realize those downhill moments don't necessarily need to be a time in which we slam on or ride the brakes. We can *downshift*, use the clutch and the engine to steer the ship, and engage with lower gears to slow down the vehicle yet keep optimal momentum.
- **THE TECHNIQUE:** You can go from cruising in 6th gear and slam on the brakes... or realize that your car is built to go from 6th to 5th, to 4th, even to

3rd gear if necessary. Done correctly, your foot never touches the brake and you maintain momentum and control.

- **MINISTRY APPLICATION (SYSTEMS & TEAMS):** What does that look like in life and ministry? If everything depends on you, when there's a descent, you go down and everything goes down with you and the brakes have to be applied. BUT, if you build systems and teams, *you* may need to slow down, but the church keeps momentum. You may need to hit a downhill moment, but your team can maintain control and manage a descent without ever having to apply the brakes.
- **THE AUDIT:** What gears have you incorporated that you can offload and engage? Who can you delegate what to? In a transmission, the closer the gear is to the other, the closer the opening point in which they can catch and carry the engine. It's impossible (technically: *damaging*) to go from 6th gear to 1st without causing some damage. But if you're in 6th gear, the point between your speed and ability to carry the engine is not too far from 5th gear. Again, the clutch—learning to use it and engage it allows you, while in 6th gear, to use the clutch to pull in to 5th gear and "offload." The brake doesn't have to be applied, but there's power in passing the engine off to others.
- **THE FINISH:** And in doing this well, we never compromise the vision, mission, and momentum of the vehicles God has entrusted us with.