

Aspire (Week 4) - Openness
Yesterday's Sermon Summary

1. So why a series on our church's core values? In part, so we can close the gap between our formal values (what's written on a piece of paper) and our actual values (what our actions and words show that we value).

2. Our church's 4th core value reads as follows: "Openness – Reformed and Always Reforming. As a PCUSA church, we seek to be open to God's continuing work of reformation within our church so that we will be more effective in our God-given mission. We recognize that we are in a rapidly changing world in which new challenges, needs, opportunities, and questions arise constantly, so we must be open to responding with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love while being guided by our Christ-centered values."

3. What might be most striking about this particular core value in America 2025 is how courageous and countercultural it is. In fact, according to a recent study, 95% of American adults think they're more open minded than they actually are. If we want to be open-minded, we need to understand the nuts and bolts of close-mindedness and open-mindedness.

4. Close-mindedness is both cause and effect, spring and stream. Fear, anxiety, and stress are the root cause of close-mindedness (which explains a lot of what we're experiencing in our country right now). And from close-mindedness, a host of unfortunate dominos fall: e.g., willful blindness (ignoring data or experiences that disagree with your current beliefs) and confirmation bias (prioritizing only that which agrees with what you already think). In the end, a close-minded person becomes more rigid and fragile simultaneously.

5. In order to understand our own open and close-mindedness, we need to pay attention to our "externally generated thinking." That phrase refers to how external forces, like your family of origin, formative figures in your past, and social circles now, influence how open or closed you might be as a person. For example, if you were raised not being able to question your family's values, you'll struggle more being open-minded.

6. In order to value openness, we need to do two things. First, we need to protect KirkWood as a safe, brave space (for a good description of that, look at Micky Scottbey Jones' "An Invitation To A Brave Space" in the next section). So how do we do that? Well, we need to ask - whose mind are we trying to change? We all know by personal experience that arguing doesn't open a closed mind. However, creating a safe space in which self-exploration and self-correction is encouraged and even expected allows all of us the chance to change the one mind that we can - our own.



7. Here are a few other characteristics of a safe, brave space: a) We share stories (about why we believe what we do, how we arrived at those conclusions, and/or key shaping moments/people) more than we give answers; b) We prize diversity of all kinds because, as one psychologist puts it, "Want an open door? Have an open door."; c) We love questions more than definitive statements, especially those questions that lead to greater self-understanding or that

8. A second key trait of being open-minded is what's labeled "intellectual humility." Humility, of course, is a major feature of Judeo-Christian character (see, for example, [Psalm 25.9](#), [Psalm 119.67](#), and [James 4.6](#)). St. Thomas Aquinas calls humility the "queen of all virtues" because all other positive character traits flow from it, or conversely, can't happen without it (St. Augustine said something to that effect).

9. What's intellectual humility like? It pays close attention to what evolutionary scientists call "forcing feedback." Forcing feedback is when we encounter new information or experiences or points of view that challenge what we already are. A close-minded person glosses over these, whereas an open-minded person asks questions, leans in, is curious, and is willing to adapt. In short, an open-minded person isn't afraid of being wrong.

10. "Intellectual humility" also moves past simplistic, easy answers in favor of complexity, nuance, depth, and even ambiguity. As a rule of thumb, the better you understand a subject, the more humble you become. The most dangerous place to be is to know a little and then be overconfident about how much you actually understand (this is what Adam Grant calls being on "[Mount Stupid](#)").

For This Week

1. Pray this "Invitation to a Brave Space" for KirkWood and yourself throughout the week: [brave-space-poem](#)

2. Here are a few entry-level articles on how to become more open-minded as a person:

- [Why It's Hard to Be Open-Minded](#)
- [Keeping an Open Mind in an Increasingly Opinionated World](#)
- [How to Be Open-Minded and Why It Matters](#)
- [A New Way to Become More Open-Minded](#)