

Responding to God's Open Doors

This past week I've been reading a fascinating book by pastor John Ortberg entitled, "All The Places to Go." In it he talks about the concept of "open and closed doors" and how God often uses these doors to lead us in the direction He desires for us to go. That has led me to spend quite a bit of time thinking about this concept of "open doors".

Especially opening and closing them and I've been surprised with how many times I open and close doors on a daily basis. This morning I retraced my steps from the moment I got out of bed and finally arrived and sat down at my desk to work on my sermon this morning. From what I could recall, I opened a minimum of 20 doors just to get from my bed to my desk, and that was just in the span of 2 hours. I opened the door to my bedroom, to the bathroom, to the back room, the dryer door, the refrigerator door, my car door, the YES Center door, the church closet door, the church's back door, the church's pop machine door, the refrigerator door in my office and many of those doors I opened multiple times.

Doors come in all sorts of sizes and colors and weight. Some doors open into treasures and others keep you safe and warm and others can imprison you. And some doors when opened present whole new opportunities for adventure and discovery.

Doors, both literally and metaphorically, play key roles throughout Scripture.

The first time we see the use of "door" used is when God warns Cain about his attitude in offering up a sacrifice to God. And God warns Cain, "*If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.*" (Genesis 4:6-7) And of course Cain failed to rule over the sin crouching at the door to his heart and mind and ended up murdering his brother in a fit of rage.

Cain would have had far greater success if he had followed the advice of Solomon in Proverbs where he warns us to intentionally put a guard, a door, around each of our hearts.

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. (Proverbs 4:23 (NIV))

Jesus instructed us when we pray to get away from the worldly distractions so that we can focus solely on God by going into our quiet place and closing the door.

"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen." (Mt 6:6)

Jesus also compared prayer to knocking on God's door and that for those who persistently pray, God's door of blessing will be opened. It's as if prayer is the key to open the door to God's throne room.

Matthew 7:7-8 (NIV) *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."*

Jesus compared himself to the doorway to the sheep pen, and his followers are the sheep. By serving as the doorway he protects us from attacks from Satan and keeps us safe in His fold, which is often what the writers of the psalms call upon in times of trouble.

John 10:7-10 (NIV) *Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. 9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."*

A door played a key role in Peter denying Jesus three times. Apparently as the proceedings of the night were being played out, John was allowed access into the courtyard but Peter wasn't. So, John went back and convinced the servant girl, the keeper of the courtyard door, to let Peter in. And of

course it was in that very courtyard that Peter denied Jesus three times and the third time caught the eyes of Jesus, which was devastating to Peter.

John 18:15-16 (NIV) *Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, 16 but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant girl on duty there and brought Peter in.*

After Jesus' death we find the disciples hiding behind locked doors in a secret location for fear that they might be arrested and be put to death as well. How often do we become afraid of the hurt and pain in the world and try to shut ourselves off from it, to isolate ourselves from it? But perhaps Jesus wants to enter into our pain and suffering and fears and calls us out into the world, into it's pain to make a difference rather than to stay isolated. And Jesus walked through that locked door and offered them peace. He entered into their disturbed hearts and minds and didn't promise them protection from the hurts of this world but later commissioned them to leave the safety of that room and go out into the world and bring the power of God's kingdom to bear on this broken down hurting world.

John 20:19 (NIV) *On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"*

Jump into the book of Acts and I love the examples of doors there. Several times Jesus opened the doors that Paul or Peter were locked up in and set them free. In one such event, the church was praying for God to set Peter free and he did. But when he arrived at the house where the church was praying, Rhoda answered the door, asked who it was and Peter told her, but she was so shocked that she went back to the group praying and told them excitedly that Peter was at the door, but they initially didn't believe her. But Peter kept knocking and calling and eventually they came and opened the door and to their shock Peter was standing right there. How many times do we pray earnestly to God for something, but then we're surprised when He actually answers those prayers? In this case the door could represent our lack of faith in praying.

Several times in his writings, Paul mentions that God had opened doors for him to effectively preach the good news and for it's reception by the Gentiles and Jews. Which reminds us that evangelism isn't just about us telling someone about the good news of Jesus Christ but that our witnessing needs to first be preceded by considerable prayer as we ask God to open the closed hearts and minds to the truth of who God is and that they may be open to receiving God's love into their lives. **(Acts 14:27; 1 Corinthians 16:8-9).**

In the same manner, Paul asks the church at Colossae for their prayers that God would continue to open those doors so that his message may be received and that he may proclaim it clearly. This is a vivid reminder that God is the primary communicator of His message of love and grace and forgiveness and hope. It's the heartbeat and desire of God to have everyone come into a restored relationship with Himself, but Satan is working overtime to prevent that from happening.

Amazingly, God has chosen to use us to communicate that message of Great News. So, we should be continually praying for the effectiveness of our witness as well as the witness of this church.

Colossians 4:2-4 (NIV) *Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.*

But not only did Paul experience God opening up doors for the Gentiles to hear and receive the gospel message, but also Paul experienced God closing other doors as He directed Paul's path to exactly where God wanted to Paul to go and preach the gospel. It didn't make sense to Paul at the time, but he just kept seeking God while continuing to move forward. **(Acts 16:6-7)**

This serves as a reminder that we need to have our minds and hearts alert to following God's leading in our witnessing endeavors and not just blaze on through our clever plans. One of the keys

to Jesus' life was that he was always in tune to the Father's leading and only went where the Father led him to go. As individuals and as a church, we need to continually seek direction from God as to what we should be doing next and how we should be doing it. And that's one of the reasons I've become so interested in this concept of "doors" is because as part of the leadership team here, we've been praying for God to direct us and fairly recently we've been seeing Him opening up several doors and that's been exciting. You'll be hearing more about these open doors at the church's annual meeting this Wednesday night. And I can clearly trace much of this to a couple of months ago praying on Wednesday night that God would expand our witness and show us how to more effectively use these facilities for His honor and glory and the spreading of His Good News.

When we get to the last book of the Bible we see a fascinating passage of Scripture in one of the letters to the 7 churches in Asia. The letter to the church at Philadelphia says this.

Revelation 3:7-8 (NIV) *"To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.*

I find this passage tremendously encouraging and let me tell you why. This church in Philadelphia isn't a large mega-church that's busting at the seams and everything is going great. They've been through some tough times and they are struggling and tired and weak. The struggles they've been going through have zapped their strength individually and as a church. Can anyone here this morning relate to that? As you'll see in my report for the annual meeting, my assessment is that this has been a difficult past year for many of us within this body of believers for various reasons. Many have felt pretty beat up and beaten down. Our strength has been drained. And in the midst of that I'm greatly encouraged by this letter. Because I see some of the same things in Knollwood that I see God address to the church in Philadelphia. I believe we also have consistently and faithfully kept God's Word and not denied His name. We've continued to praise Him and allow His love to fill our hearts and flow out to others, both within this church and outside of it. And I believe God is offering up to each of us an open door. Precisely what that looks like for each of us I don't know. But one thing I know for certain that it does mean is that the open door provides access into God's presence, which everyone of us is invited into. Once we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we become members of God's family. And to his family God has an open door policy. His door is never closed, night or day. And while God doesn't prevent heartaches and disappointments from barging into our lives, He offers us His presence and power and His strength when ours is weak. And we sure need that. And it says that no one can shut this door and close us off from God's presence.

The other thing that this open door says is that God has a purpose and mission for that church and for ours as well. As you read on in that passage of Scripture, God says that he is going to use that church in mighty ways to bring Satan and his army of demons to their knees in acknowledgment of who God is and how He loves His people. And he promises to put His stamp of approval upon this church so that they will be a bright light in an otherwise dark and discouraging world. And God wants to do that for this church and for each of us as well. God wants to open doors for each of you to be a powerful witness for Him in all the locations He strategically places you. Notice, that it's not you opening up these doors, it's God opening up those doors and allowing you to be used by Him to break through Satan's powerful grip on people's lives and shine his light of hope and love. For us to be effective God needs us to faithfully pursue Him and stay true and committed to Him. And if that's what we're doing and living each day that He is going to open new doors of opportunity for us, then it brings a whole new sense of excitement to live each day and even in the midst of broken hearts and shattered dreams God is still at work doing what He does best.

In upcoming weeks I want to continue to look at this concept of open doors and how we can recognize them and walk through them with confidence and also learn how not to follow the many examples of individuals throughout the Bible that were given open doors by God and tried to get out of walking through them and following God's call upon their lives.

Invitation:

As we come into the time of invitation I want to mention one more door.

Revelation 3:20 (NIV) *Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.*

This is the door of each of our lives and hearts that God is knocking on. Perhaps you've felt God tugging on our heart to come and accept His love for you but so far you've been resistant. Why? Why not accept God's tremendous love for you, have your sins forgiven through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and come into a restored relationship with your Heavenly Father and begin to live a life of open doors and endless possibilities of being used by Him to tell others about His love for them?