

Open Door Sermon #5 *Preparing Ourselves for Open Doors* June 25, 2017

When I began this sermon series on “open doors” 6 weeks ago, the very first Bible verse I referred to and the very first time the word “door” is used in the Scripture is in **Genesis 4:6-7** where God warns Cain that *“If you do not do what is right sin is crouching at your door and that it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”* Did you catch how it described the action of sin? It conveys the idea of a wild ferocious animal who’s crouched down waiting to pounce on a vulnerable victim. And that’s often how Satan works. He throws situations our way and then deviously waits and watches to see if this bait will work to get us to bite and sin. And when we bite, sin jumps right through this door of opportunity and attacks us. Unfortunately we know that Cain failed to take God’s warning and thoughts and feelings of jealousy and anger walked right through the open door to his mind and heart prompting him to murder his own brother.

This morning I want to suggest some practical ways that you can rule over the sin that is crouching at the doorway of your mind and heart.

It would have been helpful for Cain and ourselves to heed the instruction of God recorded for us in **Proverbs 8:34-36 (NIV)** *Blessed are those who listen to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. For those who find me find life and receive favor from the Lord. But those who fail to find me harm themselves; all who hate me love death.”*

This verse conveys the importance of spending time at God’s doorway focusing on him rather than focusing on the sin crouching outside of your personal door waiting to pounce. Focusing on God enables us to resist the sin crouching at the doorway or your mind and heart.

These verses could be the foundational verses for the popular saying: **“Junk in – junk out.”** This saying is especially popular in the computer-programming field because it captures the idea that if you get poor input of data into a program it’s going to negatively influence the information that is produced. If you feed a computer program junk for information you’ll get a junky unhelpful report being produced.

The same principle applies to our lives as well. If you continue to allow junk to enter your life through your eyes, ears and mouth, it will end up being deposited into your mind and heart and then it’s inevitable that junk will eventually be the output of your life.

That’s why for so many men and women, privately watching pornography on their computers or cell phones and channels on TV can be so evil. Because those images end up residing in one’s mind and heart and eventually will lead to other thoughts and lead you down the road to destruction. It becomes like a drug where you crave more and more. All because a person didn’t properly guard the open door to their mind and heart.

It would be good for each of us to follow the example of example of David in **Psalms 141** where he calls out to God for help in setting up filters over the open doors to his mouth and his heart. As I read this notice the sense of urgency for David as he calls out to God.

Psalms 141:1-4 (NIV) *I call to you, Lord, **come quickly** to me; hear me when I call to you. May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice. **Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips.** Do not let my heart be drawn to what is evil so that I take part in wicked deeds*

Proverbs 4:23 (NIV) *Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.* King Solomon cautioned his readers in Proverbs 4:23 to take steps to protect or guard their hearts. But the reality is that often we seem incapable of doing that and so we find Solomon’s father, King

David calling out for God to help in that, and we likely should call out to God to help us as well in this critical daily endeavor.

So, before we move on let me stop and ask you for a moment – **what kind of safeguards have you put into place to guard what comes into your mind and heart?** There are apps available to help you if you struggle with online pornography as many many Christians do.

However, let me go a bit deeper and more personal for a moment.

What if you struggle with **jealousy** or **pride** or **anger** or **unforgiveness** or **gossip** – what kinds of safeguards have you put into place for those types of un-Christ-like attitudes and actions? You see it's easy to identify if we struggle with pornography but many of us struggle with just as insidious forms of destructive input into our minds and hearts that can so easily lead us down a path of destructiveness.

How do you know if you're struggling with some of these attitudes?

- For those of you on **social media: Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter or Instagram** – look at what you typically post on there. Are your posts uplifting or critical. Are you trying to help others or simply draw attention to yourself? These are powerful mediums by which you can be a witness for your love of God – or you can simply complain to the world about how your day is going and thus elicit sympathy from others. It would be good for many of us to type out this verse and post it above your computer screen or as a screen saver as a filter for what you're about to type.

Colossians 3:17 (NIV) *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him*

So every time you're about to post to Facebook or send out a Tweet or a picture ask yourself – is this going to draw attention to God or myself and what's my purpose in posting this or sending it out?

If it's simply to elicit sympathy from others then perhaps you've allowed self-centeredness to walk through the doorway to your mind and heart and take up residence in your life.

- What do you think about when you're idle? When you're driving and someone cuts you off where does your mind go? Is it toward the other driver and how you were mistreated? A better approach would be to focus on how generously you've offended God and yet He continues to forgive and love you. And in fact rather than Jesus becoming angry with you for your many offenses, He died on the cross for your sin.
- In your conversations with others, are you typically talking the praise of others or God or are you gossiping about others? I know that some of us struggle with this open door. Often this shows up in someone's life that outwardly and in front of most people they are very positive and complimentary but get them one on one and you can often get an earful about what this person did or said or how horrible this individual acted the other day. A good scripture to tape on your mirror at home or on the visor in your car would be:

Ephesians 4:29 (NIV) *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*

I learned a new word this week, which is always a good week when that happens. The word is **Pronoia**. Does anyone know what it means? It's actually pretty easy to figure it out once you know the meaning of it's opposite.

Pronoia is sort of the opposite of Paranoia.

Paranoia is the irrational belief that there is a conspiracy out there to hurt you.

Pronoia, on the other hand, is the belief that there is a conspiracy out there to help you.

Wouldn't it be great if all we ever did was told others how great each other is to their face and behind their backs. How would that make you feel if you heard that was going on behind your back? It would certainly make you hold that other person spreading good reports about you up in high esteem.

We should be creators of Pronoia – where people just keep getting these reports flowing in about the great things being said about them behind their backs.

I find it interesting that in the verse right after **Ephesians 4:29** where we are encouraged to be engaged in Pronoia, that it warns us against grieving the Holy Spirit. Is it possible that gossiping about others behind their backs is one of the things that grieves the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit sees each of us from God's perspective and in God's eyes each of us is of incredible worth, and when we talk badly about others we're diminishing the tremendous value God places on each of us.

I'm pretty excited about a find I purchased at a garage sale this past Friday and I think it captures well an antidote to thinking and speaking negatively about others. It says, "**Never Lose Your Sense of Wonder.**" Immediately it takes me to thinking about God and vastness of this universe we're so privileged to live in. But what if we also applied that same approach to how we look at others. What if we lived in a constant state of wonder about the beauty and uniqueness and specialness of every person you meet and know and talk about them to others. What a huge difference that could make in someone's life.

I was joking with someone last night at the church picnic who was trying to describe me, as a pastor, to a friend of theirs. I suggested that they should describe me as **unique** or **special** – but cautioned that the **tone of their voice** in using that description is important. We have the ability to counteract the negativity and put-downs that are so prevalent in our society by seeing the wonder and uniqueness that God has created in each and every one of us. Allowing those positive thoughts to pass through the doorways to our minds and hearts and then allow those uplifting and encouraging thoughts and attitudes freely flow out of our mouths.

I know that this is a great caution to myself because I can often be sarcastic to people in attempting to be humorous rather than uplifting and sometimes my sarcasm has gotten carried away. If that's happened to you I apologize and want to encourage you to tell me if that's hurtful – because I never want to hurt any of you – I love every one of you too much to ever desire to hurt you. I want to be known much more as a spreader of Pronoia than really good at using sarcasm.

I've been spending some time recently reading and meditating on the book of Philippians. It's an amazing letter that Paul wrote to the church at Philippi. It's amazing because he wrote it while under house arrest in Rome and yet rather than getting depressed or discouraged he wrote one of the most upbeat of all of his letters. In fact, other Christians are a little down that their greatest evangelist is under house arrest and so Paul tries to use this letter to encourage them in their walk with the Lord. A whopping **16 times** within this letter Paul talks about either "**joy**" or "**rejoicing**". In fact in **Philippians 4:4** he instructs every Christians to "**Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice.**" Now this instruction wasn't just a good idea Paul came up with and wrote to the church at Philippi. I believe this practice of rejoicing in the Lord had become a practice and discipline in Paul's life which equipped him to endure so much suffering in his lifetime preaching the Gospel. You can see evidence of this in Paul's life when he first preached in Philippi. While preaching there some locals became quite upset with him and got him and Silas thrown into prison. And when we're allowed a glimpse into their prison cells what are they doing? Are they moaning and complaining? No!! Are they depressed and disappointed with God for allowing this to happen to them? No!!

It says that they were praying and praising God from their jail cells and all the other prisoners were listening to them. Imagine the impact that this had to have had upon those other prisoners. I'm guessing they'd never seen or heard that from a fellow inmate before.

So, what allowed Paul and Silas to respond in this remarkable way?

First, I'm convinced Paul never lost the **wonder** of God and the fact that God saved a sinner like him. This astonishment never grew old for Paul.

Secondly, I think a key to Paul's attitude and practice of rejoicing is what he allows to enter the open door of his mind and heart.

We get a glimpse of what that doorway to his mind and heart looks like a few verses after Paul instructs us to rejoice in the Lord always.

Philippians 4:8-9 (NIV) *Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

Did most of your thoughts or conversations with other this week fall under one of these areas?

A couple of observations on this instruction:

Notice that Paul doesn't instruct them to act until after he instructs them how to think.

The result of thinking and meditating on these things is that the God of peace will be with us. But wait a minute – I thought God promised to always be with me and never leave me. That's absolutely true. But I think what Paul is talking about here is that the God of peace will be more easily recognized as being with you if you're consciously spending time dwelling on the things he mentions here. You see these qualities are really the character of God. And so as we think about these qualities we ought to be thinking about God but we also ought to be thinking about others in light of these qualities as well. And as we do that we begin to see them as God sees them.

Sometimes we need to ask God to help us see people as He sees them and then simply wait for God to reveal to you how He sees them. And as you engage in intentionally spending time thinking about these things Paul suggests – as you allow these types of thoughts to enter the doorway of your mind and heart – then you begin to walk increasingly closer with God and recognize His presence right there with you. You begin to see others through God's eyes and feel them with His heart. And as you do that, you begin to treat others as Christ would treat them and you'll feel like you're on a missions of love and blessing with God working right there with you. And as you do that God's love and blessing will naturally flow out of the doorway of your mind and heart and fall on others in such a powerful way that they will naturally be drawn into a state of wonder about who this God you love and chase after is. **Which opens wide the doorway for you to be able to say – “Let me tell you about Him and how He's so powerfully changed my mind and heart and the direction and purpose of my life.”**

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Key life principle: Junk _____ = Junk _____

What does David ask God for in Psalm 141:1-4?

What did King Solomon instruct us to do in Proverbs 4:23?

What safeguards do you have for your mind and heart?

If you followed the instructions of Colossians 3:17 what would change in your life?

Paranoia: _____

Pronoia: _____

In the letter of Philippians what is used 16 times? _____ or _____

Keys to Paul's great attitude:

1. Paul never lost his sense of _____
2. What Paul allows to enter his _____ and _____

Observations on Philippians 4:8-9:

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