

## Looking for Open Doors

*Becoming a Person with a Plan*

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**Bible Text:** 1 Corinthians 16:9

**Preached on:** Sunday, February 24, 2013

### **Faith Church**

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Well, this past Wednesday we had the joy and the privilege of dedicating our new safe haven home for victims of fire and flood and domestic violence. Many of you took time this past Sunday for our open house and you saw what a wonderful provision it is from our friends over at Subaru, Indiana Automotive and their generosity that is going to help us serve families in need for many years to come. We are really looking forward to begin using it for ministry.

There is all sorts of marvelous stories in connection with that project, because there were dozens and dozens of businesses and community leaders and community members who came together to make the project a reality. But one of my favorite stories has to do with this dresser.

Not long after we received word of a gift from Subaru we were approached by these two young ladies Katherine Bathe and Erin Loch. Katherine and Erin attend our church and they are eighth graders over at Lafayette Christian School. And they asked if they could be involved in the project by purchasing a dresser from Goodwill and then painting it and then stocking it with whatever supplies we would ask them to provide, but they were thinking especially of books and toys that might be useful to children whose families would stay at Safe Haven after a fire or after some other emergency need. But they were concerned about what was in the home for children.

What I love about that story, in part, is that thought never crossed my mind. I was even involved in some of the initial discussions and agreements with SIA. I participated in the ground breaking. I knew about the project. But it never dawned on me to consider what might be a special blessing to the children of the families that we were seeking to serve. But it did dawn on Katherine and Erin. In fact, not only did they think about it, but they actually designed and accomplished a project that turned their dream into a reality.

And there are a thousand things, I think, to love about that story, but what I would like to point out this morning is that it illustrates the power and the beauty of looking for open doors. And that just happens to be the next step in the strategic planning process.

With that in mind, open your Bible, if you would, to 1 Corinthians chapter 16. That is on

page 139 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that this morning.

By now you know for sure if you have been attending our church that our theme for 2013 is: Planning to grow. Right? You think about that all the time now. Right? Planning to grow. And one of the verses that we are using to emphasize this and undergird it is Proverbs 21:5.

“The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance.”<sup>1</sup>

That is a promise. That is a promise from God himself. And we want, therefore, to be the kind of people who plan well. Well, hopefully by now when you think about that theme you also begin to gravitate mentally toward the three areas in which we are especially hoping to see that flesh out this year. One is to continue to discuss and refine and implement our discipleship process. How do we become growing followers of Christ together? Now we are into this a couple of months we have seen some very good advancements already in that particular area. We are planning to grow and we are growing. Glad for that. And then the second emphasis is organizing and launching our new cluster of ministries at Faith West. And Titus explained a little bit about that song that has been written by the worship team to help us be prepared for this very endeavor, this particular initiative. Pretty fired up about it. Are you? Planning to grow. And then, thirdly, to work together as a church family to develop our next five year strategic ministry plan. So that is what we are all about this year, planning to grow.

Now because of that in this first quarter of the year, in our preaching services we are talking about becoming a person with a plan. We are encouraging one another to develop specific plans in our personal lives, We call it a personal improvement plan, a PIP. And to take part also in the planning process this year at our church and to drill down into the specific ministry that you are involved in around here and I hope you have at least one of those. God has given you a spiritual gift. I hope you are not letting it die on the vine. So I assume you are involved in various ministries here at the church house. Well, that requires planning. So we are trying to do that as well. And then maybe even using those principles in your work or your business, but becoming a person with a plan.

“The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance.”<sup>2</sup>

Now so far we have studied what Scripture says about several different aspects of this. We started by talking about the value and the importance of planning. So we went to the ant in Proverbs chapter six. And then being committed to the goal of the process, that is becoming more like Christ or living in a way that is more pleasing to the Lord or glorifying him or increasingly effective stewardship. You have to know where your planning is going. That was the point of that.

And then identifying our priorities, our key effectiveness areas, our core values and what

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<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 21:5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

are the categories of life in which we have to be sure that we are making specific plans so we don't let that particular priority drop off the screen. Then, in another important part of the process, thinking about our strengths and thinking about our weaknesses and each one of those priority areas, in each one of those key effectiveness areas. And then last week pastor Green helped us consider the possible threats and what we can do to protect our plans and our goals from being derailed.

Well, this morning we want to see now what the apostle Paul told the Corinthian church about the importance of looking for open doors. In many ways the fun is beginning in the church or the strategic planning process, because if you have done the work either mentally or actually that I have just described and that we have studied now for the last six weeks together, now you get to look for open doors.

Let's start in 1 Corinthians 15:58. If you know your Bible, you know that is the great resurrection chapter of the Bible. And Paul says at the end of that chapter in verse 58:

“ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. Now concerning the collection for the saints...”<sup>3</sup>

And, again, if you know your Bible, you know that the Gentile churches like the one at Corinth were in the process of receiving a love offering for their Jewish brothers and sisters who were living in extreme famine and that was part of what God was using to draw the Jews and the Gentiles together. And so they are taking an offering right now. There is actually some details about that.

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come. When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem; and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me.

But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia; and perhaps I will stay with you, or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way wherever I may go. For I do not wish to see you now just in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits. But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid, for he is doing the Lord's work, as I also am. So let no one despise him. But send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I expect him with the brethren. But concerning Apollos our brother, I encouraged

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:58—16:1.

him greatly to come to you with the brethren; and it was not at all his desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity.

Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.<sup>4</sup>

We are talking this morning about looking for open doors, being like the apostle Paul in this text, letting it impact us just like it was to impact the church in Corinth. And so with the time we have remaining, let's think about four principles to help you see and seize. That is what we are all about this morning, see and seize the ministry opportunities that the Lord provides.

It starts right here I think. Be amazed that God would provide open doors for people like us. Are you amazed by that?

In his commentary on 1 Corinthians John MacArthur said this. "The Lord's worker must have a vision for the future." Just like Katherine and Erin did, by the way, two young ladies. The Christian who is motivated and consumed by God's love, no doubt, will see needs that are not yet filled and opportunities that are not yet met. He cannot help planning ahead. It is just squirting out of you. Are you feeling it? He can't help planning ahead, looking for more ways to serve and more doors to open. Absolutely.

And I think the key phrase there is motivated and consumed by God's love, never having gotten over the fact that God would be willing to use us, that he would even give us open doors to people like us even though he knows everything about our past, oops, and our present, oops, and our future. Think about that from the perspective of Paul.

Paul said this to Timothy. He said:

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.<sup>5</sup>

Would you stand in line with the apostle Paul on that one? Yeah, I hope you would.

Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. Now to the King eternal,

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 16:1-14.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Timothy 1:12-15.

immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.  
Amen.<sup>6</sup>

See, Paul never got over the fact that God's mercy was so sufficient that his sin could be forgiven and the direction of his life could be changed so dramatically that now he is actually being given wide open doors of service for Christ. It is amazing. It is also amazing when you consider the people he is writing to. In many ways the men and women of the Corinthian Church were the poster children for a dysfunctional church that needed to change in a myriad of ways. In fact, a lot of this book is just all about that. However, that is not the way Paul started the book. Do you remember the introduction? He said it like this.

“To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling.”<sup>7</sup>

Sure, you have got a lot of things wrong, but you are:

...saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus<sup>8</sup>

Amazing. Paul is thankful for this church even though they are fairly messed up.

...that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>9</sup>

So now here is the point of that. All of these problems that are going to be presented throughout the book of 1 Corinthians between what I just read just a moment ago and what we have started with, 1 Corinthians 16:9, open doors of opportunity, all those problems, they are presented in terms of doors of opportunity that can help this group of men and women get to a better place together. So far from giving up on them, because of their weaknesses, Paul had high hopes for them. That is why he was making plans right then to eventually come and spend time with them. Right there, there were open doors of ministry where he was in Ephesus. That is what he said in 1 Corinthians 16:9. But he felt the same way about his pending time with them.

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Timothy 1:16-17.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:2.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:2-4.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:5-9.

“For I do not wish to see you now just in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits.”<sup>10</sup>

The book illustrates all the doors of opportunity that existed among them as well. But he is not writing them off because of their shortcomings. He has high hopes for these men and women and where God could take them in the days ahead. There is doors of opportunity for you as well.

Now while we are in that neighborhood, let’s just bring that around to us. I mean, think about what you and me bring to the table. I mean, Paul was really clear about him. And all the reasons God might have had to not give him ever a door of opportunity for service. And all the things about the Corinthian church that were messed up, but how if God wanted to could have said, “They are not ever going to be fit for service.”

Well, what about you and me?

Think about these two questions. One. Do you really believe this morning, honestly now, that God has specific doors of opportunity for effective service available for you right now? Do you believe that? Did he give you open doors that you could have walked thought is past week? Will he give you open doors for effective service today? Will he give you open doors of effective service even this coming week? The point is that he has divinely prepared you for and he has divinely prepared for you. Honestly. I am asking you straight up. Do you even believe that this morning? And then this. Given everything you know about your past and everything you know about your present and everything you know about your present and everything you know about your likely future which is something other than absolute pristine perfection, does the fact that God would provide open doors of effective service available to you and to me and to us, does that amaze you this morning? Isn’t that proof of God’s amazing grace? And think about the argument of the book of 1 Corinthians. Right at the very center is that passage we frequently read when we are celebrating the Lord’s table together.

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.<sup>11</sup>

See the fact that God would give Paul and the fact that God would give the Corinthian Church and the fact that Paul would give people like you and me open doors of effective service, that ought to cause us to immediately run to the table in our minds. And remember. All that was necessary to secure our salvation—we sang about that a lot this

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<sup>10</sup> 1 Corinthians 16:7.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

morning—and all that was necessarily to transform us into men and women who could even walk through doors that were given to us from our God and make a difference for him.

By the way, that is why if you are here this morning and you have not yet trusted Christ, it is important for you to understand that from the perspective of Scripture without faith it is impossible to do this. That is the first open door.

“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”<sup>12</sup>

And we would invite you this morning to first admit your need and place your faith and trust in Christ as Savior and Lord and then join us on this great journey of seeking and seizing open doors of opportunity to serve the Lord together.

Now I realize, you might say, “Well, pastor, I honestly didn't seize any open doors of ministry for Christ this past week. I am not sure I would do that today. I am not sure I would even think about doing that next week, because I am not sure I have the power to actually go through the door. I am not sure I have the wisdom to see the door of opportunity.”

Don't forget this. All of this is founded on God's transforming power. Please keep in mind, again, the argument of the book of 1 Corinthians. Now, let's just have a little quiz. Here you go. 1 Corinthians 16 follows 1 Corinthians 15. How is that? Very good. And what is 1 Corinthians 15 all about? It is the most exhaustive chapter in the entire Bible about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And we are not going to review it for sake of time, but that might be a good thing to do this afternoon while you are letting your pie settle is read over 1 Corinthians 15 and just rejoice again in the resurrection power of Christ. And it is important to see that Paul proceeds this discussion about open doors of effective service with this discussion of the resurrection.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.”<sup>13</sup>

Be going through the doors, looking for the doors, going through the doors, seeing them and seizing them.

“... always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.”<sup>14</sup>

So I hope all of us are amazed this morning we could even get to this place in the planning process to consider the open doors that God has prepared for us now and in the days ahead.

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<sup>12</sup> Hebrews 11:6.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:58.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Now let's take this a step further. Be encouraged also that walking through open doors can lead to a life of effectiveness. I want to encourage you to focus on that word effectiveness.

Maybe we need to just pause because I don't want this to be all ethereal. You know, sometimes people are so heavenly minded they are no earthly good. So let's not make this all ethereal. Let's just make this practical and let's make it for today. Does that sound like a good idea? Yes, it does, thank you very much, pastor Viars.

So what does this look like for people like you and me today? Well, let's go back to this. Do you remember your personal improvement plan? You got this at home, right? And you have taken time to work through your key effectiveness areas, your priorities. You have thought honestly about your strengths and your weaknesses. You have even thought through some steps you are going to need to take in order to build on your strengths and shore up and improve your weaknesses. And you have got the thing laminated under your pillow, right? I mean, you are working on this. We are not here just to yakety yak at the church house before the restaurants open. We are here to be doers of the Word. So I am assuming you are applying what it is that... if you are not, let me know. I ain't coming next Sunday. I mean, why would I do this unless we are all going to apply it, right?

Some of you are into this. Oh, wait, we could get him to not come next week. No, I just... that was an empty threat off my hose. So, anyway, back to this. Hopefully you have worked this through, either in your mind or on a piece of paper. So by now you have thought about your key effectiveness areas. You sketched out your strengths and your weaknesses. You have considered the threats. Where does that leave us? If you have got that done mentally or actually, where does that leave us? And here is the answer, looking of the open doors. There it is. What are the open doors to either build on one of my strengths in one of those key effectiveness areas or shore up one of my weaknesses in one of those priority areas? See, make that practical. Ok, fine.

Let's say you are a teenager and you know right now as you have thought about how you function in your family, you know right now that you are struggling with rebellion. I mean, what teenager doesn't? So you have been honest. You have been authentic about that rebellious strand that is in your heart.

So what can you do today about that? Well here we go. Go home today and look for open doors of effective service.

Do you think as a teenager if you are struggling with rebellion that God will give you some open doors for effective service to do something about that today? What is the answer. Yeah, yeah. Absolutely. Like this.

"Mom, can I help with dinner? Mom, can I help clean up the table? Mom, can I do the dishes? Mom, can I call 911 because you look a little pale right now based on those three questions I just asked you?"



Now, see, no big drama, no big production here, but are your eyes... here is the question. Are your eyes looking for doors of effective service to put off selfish rebellion by growing and honoring and serving your parents? Don't make it harder than it is. But don't miss the door.

Let's say you are single and you want to grow at being a better friend. So what is the door of opportunity today. Perhaps it is finding someone who is new in the church house and inviting them to come with you and your crew to lunch today. No big deal, really, but looking for an open door of effective service, like right now, today.

Maybe you are working in your lab and you pause before you start and you ask the Lord to help you see him in your experiments and to honor him today in your work ethic. And all of the sudden you just walked through an open door of opportunity to enjoy the day looking for his glory instead of being bored and discouraged by the monotony of it all.

Or maybe this. Maybe you are heading to the office and you pray on the way that the Lord would give you a door of opportunity. What do you do on the way to your office? What are you thinking about as you are driving your car to the work house? What is even going through your mind? I hope you are saying, "God, please help me see doors of opportunity to be a blessing to somebody else who is hurting or speak a word for Christ to somebody who is in need. And then later on in the morning you are there in the break room, just you and another person and that individual tells you about their parents who just received a bad medical diagnosis. You think that might be an open door for you? Are you going to see it? Are you going to look for it? Are you going to seize it? Are you going to keep crunching on your scone?"

And you might simply say, "Would you like me to pray with you about that?" And right there in the break room you have a word of prayer together. And who knows where the Lord could take a conversation like that? But I believe, don't you? There are wide doors of effective service made available to us each and every day. And one of the questions for all of us is: Are we in the habit of looking for them? Think about that. Are we in the habit of looking for them? And what this text is teaching us is: if we are, if you string enough of those opportunities together, the result is a life that makes a real difference in things that are going to matter for eternity. And don't you love that? It is the opposite of living in a way that is vain. And that is the context here. These are the bookends.

"...knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."<sup>15</sup>

Well, the opposite of that is a wide door for effective service. It makes a difference. It matters. It accomplishes something.

I remember speaking with a college administrator who said to me, "I don't want my minister to amount to 35 years of nothing." Good word. That really impacted me. That is

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<sup>15</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:58.

true. God gives us opportunities every day for what kind of service? For effective, effective service.

Think about that from the perspective of your specific ministry growth plan. I hope every person here is involved in ministry because I know God, if you are a Christian, has entrusted you with spiritual gifts that are to be used for the edification of the body and the accomplishment of our mission here. And I hope you have been thinking about if you are a second grade Sunday school teacher or if you are a youth worker or however it is, that you serve God around this place. I hope you have thought about your core values. I hope you thought about your strengths. I hope you thought about your weaknesses. I hope you are doing some planning.

Well, what is the fact that if we are looking for open doors that it leads to effective service, what does that really mean? Well, here is an example. I mentioned several times this year that we have a number of service opportunities available in our children's ministries on Sunday mornings and on Wednesday nights.

You say, "Why is that?"

Well, because we have more people coming to this church than ever before in our entire history. That is why. That is good, huh? That might be effective. That is good. Winning people to Christ. And so many of those people have, well, children. So we want to be A plus in our children's ministries, do we not? We see that as a gift from God that we don't want to miss, a wide open door for effective service.

There is also the value that we place around here on reaching young families, young families, because that is a time when men and women are especially open to attending church. And maybe they got out of the habit when they were in college. Maybe they were never in the habit, but having children sometimes motivates young parents to consider making God and his Word a stronger emphasis. And if that is the case, we want to be right with A plus children's ministries in order to minister to young families.

There is also this. Think about it from this perspective. I had a fascinating conversation with a speaker at our counseling conference who was here from out of town. And he was telling me this. He said, you know, one of the challenges they were facing at their church was that their pastor was getting older. Yeah. I am glad we don't have that trouble here. But at their place, he was getting older and now they are having more and more trouble reaching college students and young families.

You understand. Often churches tend to attract people who are within 20 years, older your younger than the age of the pastor. That is just a statistical fact. Well, what do you about that as your pastor gets older? And he is.

You say, "Well, replace him with a good one."

I mean that is an option that is available in our constitution, by the way, which is why I always have two weeks job security at any given time. But assuming we are not going to be doing that at least any time in the next day or so, one of the ways to overcome that dynamic is by having wonderful children's ministries that serve young families and that serve young children.

Now put all that in a hat. I just gave you three sociological issues that ought to motivate us to want to be A plus in our children's ministries. Well, you put all that in a hat, what have you got? You have open doors right now to serve in various children's ministries on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings. And I have been encouraging you to consider taking a tithes and offerings approach to service. We do that with our giving, at least the average member around here does. They tithe. That is they give an amount of money to meet just the regular garden, bread and butter ministries of this church and then offerings, specials. We give a second time around and many of us do, in order to support all of the special ministries that God has given us and we are so thankful that he does. And so tithes and offerings. And I have encouraged you to do the same thing in the relation to your service. So think about tithes, just your regular service, helping us in our Sunday morning ministries, our Wednesday night ministries, all the opportunities we have to accomplish what we say is our mission together. And then offerings, serving a second time around in one of our community ministries.

Well, thank the Lord. I have been talking about that a lot the last couple of months. Thank the Lord a number of people have taken me up on that. That is right. You know, some people actually listen to these sermons. Can you believe that? And they actually want to be doers of the Word. True. So a number of people have taken... now there is room for more. But what about those who saw and seize open doors of opportunity in one of our children's ministries and they are all over it? What does that mean today? Well, it means they probably came in here a little earlier today or they might leave a little bit later. They spent time preparing at some point this week. But now what is happening today? The answer is they get to be part of teaching the Word of God to children in a way that could potentially make an eternal difference in that child's life. That is right. In some cases they will be able to present the gospel of Jesus Christ to a child who has never fully understood before what it means to become a Christian and perhaps that little child will go home today and mom and dad will have an opportunity to lead their child to Christ today.

I can still think... I can still name some of the men and women who were my Sunday school teachers when I was growing up. I can name and am very thankful for teachers and friends in my Christian school, people who had a profound impact on my life simply because they were willing to walk through open doors of service. And here is the point. Here is the point I am making. That leads to a life of what? Of effectiveness, of investing in things that will stand the test of time. And the beauty of it is, over time that can just become a characteristic of the way you live, walking through an open door. That just becomes part of your DNA, leading to a life that is incredibly effective.

I would ask you. What is the next open door for you? Now also notice this from this text. This characterized the way the apostle Paul lived. I mean, why was Paul able to recognize this opportunity that was presenting itself in Ephesus? The answer is because, at least in part, he had developed a pattern of living this way every day. For example, the ministry to the Gentiles on his first missionary journey, how was that described? As an open door. Amazing, by the way, that the Gentiles were going to be allowed into the Church.

“When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith...”<sup>16</sup>

That is the way the apostle Paul presented that to the Jewish church. The later he would say to the Corinthians, see, talking about an open door at Troas.

“Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord, I had no rest for my spirit...”<sup>17</sup>

Now think about that. When is the last time you saw an open door of opportunity for God that fired you up so much that between the time that you saw it and the time that you seized it, you had no rest for your spirit? That made the building creak. Good timing on that, sound guys. When was the last time that happened to you?

Hear this? He even prayed about that when he was in jail. I love this verse.

“...praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned.”<sup>18</sup>

Don't you love it? Not some lame, well, pray that I will get out of jail. Pray that the government will change. No, pray that God will open for me a door for the Word. When is the last time you prayed like that? In fact, while we are just having this chat, on an average day how long is it between the time you wake up and the time you are looking for open doors of service for God? See, there reason Paul was able to so quickly recognize the one in Ephesus on this particular day, it was because he was in the habit of looking of them and seizing them all the time. This is part of the way men live.

Now what else do we need to add to this discussion just to be sure that I am practicing full disclosure here? There is another part of this text we better talk about. Be ware that open doors are often accompanied by hard challenges. That is right. For Paul had said:

“...for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Acts 14:27.

<sup>17</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:12-13.

<sup>18</sup> Colossians 4:3.

<sup>19</sup> 1 Corinthians 16:9.

John MacArthur said this. "Paul was not intimidated by opposition. He seemed even to flourish on it, perhaps because he realized that the devil's greatest opposition is to the Lords' greatest work." That is right.

G. Campbell Morgan said, "If you have no opposition in the place you serve, you are serving in the wrong place." What about for us? You may be looking at a particular open door in your personal improvement plan or in our church's five year plan or in your specific ministry plan and you would say this. Walking through that particular door would be hard. Which is exactly what you ought to walk through it. Because Jesus called you to take up your cross, not sit in a hot tub.

Do we all understand that? Do we all understand that if there is a little bit of adversarial aspect to the open door that we are walking through, fine. That is part of what it means to be a follower of Christ.

I would encourage you to do this. I would encourage you to look through your bulletin. There is all sorts of open doors. In fact, this thing is chock full of them. Like tonight {?} could be right here in this opportunity, a secular public school, their teachers have been teaching them a series on religious music, much of it absolutely Christ centered in a public school. And now they have a concert. Now they have a beautiful performing arts center. They could have it there, but they like to have it in a church, because they like it when a church family will come and actually support these kids and support these parents.

Now do you think that might be an open door for effective service for you? And I wasn't talking to the person sitting next to you. I am talking to you. See, let's not yakety yak about open doors and planning, blah, blah, blah, if we are not going to act on it. If that is not an open door for service for this church today for you, I don't know what is? There is opportunities for serving in the passion play. They are listed right there in the bulletin. And a wide open door for effective service. There is an opportunity to get involved in Faith Community Institute classes on Wednesday nights starting a week from this Wednesday, great classes. This place will be packed with community members on Wednesday nights, many of them not knowing the Lord. Do you think that might be an open door of service for you? You say it is not convenient. Who cares? You say I am not sure I want to. Who cares? The question is: Is it an open door of service for God? And are you going to organize? Because otherwise, forget planning. I mean, why are we even talking about planning? Unless they are the kind of people that say, "It doesn't matter if there are a few adversaries. If it is an open door for effective service for God I am all over it.

And I say I am not sure I like the opposition. That is all right. It is there.

I like this cartoon a lot, but I was stunned by what this guy did this week, pearls before swine. Worst pig today going door to selling his home made newspaper. He is tired of always hearing bad news so he thought he would publish one filled with the opposite.

Well, how is it going? Not good. I think there is a marketing problem. Really, have you heard the good news? Slam.

I think that is blasphemous, mocking the good news of Christ? Do you realize the word gospel means good news? I think there is some things just ain't funny. And that would be one of them. Shame on that guy for doing that. Shame on him. But that is the world in which we live. And I realize you might say the reason I don't want to go through an open door of ministry is because people are going to mock me and people are going to ridicule me and I am not sure I want to pay that price.

Well, here is what the apostle Paul said about that. I am not ashamed of the good news.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”<sup>20</sup>

And one question we would all have to ask this morning is: What is it that hinders us? What is it that hinders you from seeing and seizing open doors of effective service? And if you would say this is not part of the way you life, I would encourage you to before God ask yourself why. Is it fear? Is it doubt? Is it callousness? Is it selfishness? What would prevent you and what would prevent us from doing a better job of seizing open doors?

Lastly, be encouraged by this, that walking through open doors is often a team sport. You can read down through the rest of that chapter. We just don't have time to do it, but Paul mentions all sorts of men and all sorts of women who are his fellow laborers, because they are walking through open doors for effective service together. Don't you love that? I hope when you think about our church's five year planning process we are talking about what open doors does God want us to seize together. And so we are thinking about should we add on to our school. Is that an open door for service? Should we build a senior living community on this site? Is that an open door of service? Should we construct a men's ministry out at Bethany Farms? Is that an open door of service? Should we build a new seminary and counseling center on this property? Is that an open door of service? Should we expand our outdoor athletic fields to reach our community for Christ, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera? So many open doors. Aren't you glad that God gives us open doors like that? And aren't you glad that if we want to, we can see them and we can seize them together?

Well, as we plan both in the short and the long term, let's seek and let's seize wide open doors for effective service.

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<sup>20</sup> Romans 1:16.