

## **“Open Doors: Choosing a Better You”**

Phil. 2:12-13; 2 Tim. 3:16, 2 Cor. 3:18 (TLB); James 1:2-4 (Phillips)

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March 1, 2020

Today we will begin a sermon series that is based on a Lenten study that we are doing (in Lake Charles) entitled *“Time to Dream: Open Doors to Your Future.”* The Theme for this study is centered on the image of **DOORS**. The key verse for this study is from the Book of Revelation, where Jesus says **“When I open a door, no one can close it. And when I close a door, no one can open it.”** (Rev. 3:7, CEV) The author of this study, Pastor Rick Warren, has this to say about ‘doors’: *“Throughout the Bible, God uses doors as metaphors for important decisions in life. A door can represent a **beginning** or an **end**. A door can say ‘welcome’ or a door can say ‘Keep out.’ It can represent **acceptance** or **rejection**. Sometimes God **opens** doors in your life, and sometimes God **shuts** doors... doors to a career, doors to relationships, doors to opportunities. Sometimes God uses doors to **protect** you, and sometimes he uses doors to **release** you.”*

(Here) in Lake Charles, we believe that God has chosen to ‘open a door’ to a special ‘opportunity’ in MorganField. One He did by, in effect, ‘shutting a door’ in that church’s long ministry in the Oak Park area. In the same way that God has closed some doors of ministry in [this] the Welsh church, and opened up others. And while I recognize that they are two different congregations in different situations, what we must have in common is **growth**. **Spiritual** growth in the life of its individual members, and in the lives that each of us touch in any given day. **Spiritual maturity** that should lead us to make a difference in those people’s lives. A ‘difference’ that can also lead to membership growth in our church family...

Spiritual growth and maturity are two ways to describe what can be called **DISCIPLESHIP**. If we call ourselves ‘Christian,’ then that means we are seeking to be more like the one whom we claim to follow: **Jesus**. We are Christ’s **disciples**. A student of the “Rabboni,” the Teacher. The one best qualified to instruct us on how to live a more Godly life while clothed in these fragile, fallen, flawed human bodies. As I thought about the way we are to grow and mature as Christ did, I was reminded of a really great children’s curriculum called “252 Basics.” The ‘252’ stands for *Luke 2:52*: **“And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in**

***favor with God and man.***” As we follow his example of standing firm and showing wisdom, we too will grow in favor with God and man.

So today we will consider how through Jesus we find the pathway to being a better follower of His. We will look at three ways that Jesus can **“Open Doors to Choosing a Better You.”** And ME! Perhaps the most fundamental... and ‘easiest’... way to open up doors to wisdom and maturity in Christ is through the...

**BIBLE.** ‘The B-I-B-L-E, that’s the one for me.’ There is NO more tangible, accessible, and trustworthy source of **God’s will** for our **lives** than in God’s Holy Word. It is the unparalleled ‘first edition’ of the ultimate ‘self-help’ book. ‘Unparalleled’ because, unlike any other book on the planet, it comes to us, in the words of Peter you heard last week, **“NOT by our own interpretation, but by (those who were) inspired by God.”** (2 Peter 1:21) As Paul wrote to his good friend Timothy in today’s passage, **“The whole Bible** [lit., “every Scripture”] **was given to us by inspiration from God.”** (2 Tim. 3:16) You know how you’ve heard someone sarcastically say about a quote, “Consider the source”? When you say that about a Bible quote, you can say it with **certainty** and confidence, not cynicism or sarcasm...

Because of our certainty, our confidence, in the SOURCE of these holy writings, we can without hesitation trust in its being, in further words of Paul, **“useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us do what is right.”** (2 Timothy 3:16)

I know that this Book is sometimes referred to as an ‘instruction manual’ for life, but it is SO much more than that. For I have never seen an instruction manual (you guys know what those are, right? ☺) that had the ability to make one laugh, or cry (well...); to bring inspiration or perspiration; both a book of ‘history’ and of ‘HIS-story’ (Jesus). The Bible is both a magnifying glass to more closely examine the lives of the saints of the faith... and a mirror to scrutinize our own sinful lives. It is that ‘mirror-like’ quality that makes me so appreciate the paraphrase of this verse in today’s “Living Bible” translation (and why its so valuable in general to look at other versions (yes, Willie, especially the ORIGINAL Greek and Hebrew ☺) to further appreciate the depth of meaning in the richness of God’s Word: **“to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us do what is**

**right.**” I can’t speak for you, but I sure need to sometimes ‘realize what is wrong in my life,’ in order to ‘straighten out’ and ‘do what is right’...

But even if we do ‘open the door’ on this ‘treasure-trove’ of wisdom and inspiration, how does it become MORE to us than well-written prose and narrative? How are we moved from knowing ABOUT Jesus to living FOR Jesus? How do those **words** lead to **action**? By the power of the...

**Holy Spirit.** In the same way that we need the illumination of God’s Spirit to ‘apprehend’ the meaning of God’s Word, we also need that same Spirit to APPLY it in our lives.

In Paul’s words to the church in Corinth, *“As the **Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him.**” (2 Cor. 3:18)* KNOWING how to be like Jesus is one thing... but the REAL challenge is DOING something with that knowledge. At our officers’ retreat in L.C., we considered the importance of a mission statement for the church... one that expressed succinctly, to the point, how we might describe our life’s purpose – both individually, and collectively as the church. How we are to grow in our relationship with our Lord, and share that relationship with others. We decided on **“Know Christ, and Make Christ Known.”** HOW can we do that? NOT ‘by ourselves’... but by the power of the One at work within us. ‘At work’ by the power of the **Holy Spirit.**

SOOO, in those times during the day when we pause to pray for an appointment to go well... when we pray that traffic let up and we make it through the next light... when we pray that our favorite team hit the winning basket... perhaps we should also pray for the Holy Spirit to be at work in our lives. That as much as we should pray for the time and inclination to be a ‘hearer’ of God’s Word, we should also pray to be a ‘DOER’ of God’s Word. Let us bear in mind Paul’s earlier words in this verse: ***“We Christians have no veil over our faces; we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord.” (2 Cor. 3:18)***

When we think of that word veil, we might be reminded of what happened when Jesus cried his last breath on the cross, ***“It is finished”***... the ‘veil’ in the temple was torn. The veil that separated the ‘Holy of Holies’... representing God... from the people. A barrier that could only be crossed by the High Priest. But NOW, because of Christ, you and I are those ‘priests’ that serve as an intercessor between God and man. Through us God’s power and love are

‘unveiled’ before others. As Paul said, ***“We can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord.”*** HOW? By the power of God’s **Holy Spirit**. And what is the best way for us to ‘reflect the glory of the Lord?’ Through our...

**Circumstances.** By being a living witness through our everyday life experiences that TRULY demonstrate those Bible principles at work by the power of the Spirit. Sure, it’s easy to say you’re a Christian when we’re all together here in our comfortable little ‘holy huddle.’ But how about when we ‘break the huddle’ and go out to ‘play the game’ OUT THERE? Our faith is only REAL as it helps us, and others, to more fully live ... out in the ‘REAL’ world...

As I’ve mentioned on occasion before, I have always had a special place in my heart for the book of James. Because it challenges us to take our faith from this true ‘sanctuary city’ out into a world in desperate need of ‘Good News.’ To take what we learn about God and DO it. ***“Faith without works is dead faith.”*** (James 2:26) In our efforts to show a faith that is ‘alive in Christ,’ James wrote, ***“When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives my brothers, don’t resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends! Realize that they come to test your faith and to produce in you the quality of endurance.”*** (Jas 1:2-3)

Wait just a minute. To ‘welcome trials and temptations as friends?’ Say WHAT? How can we do THAT? Well, weren’t we talking earlier about the POWER of the Holy Spirit? A power greater than our own? It is certainly that miraculous working of the Spirit... not our own human efforts... that would allow us to accept that those painful, stressful times in our life ‘come to test our faith’ and can ‘produce in us the quality of endurance.’ And, my friends, I don’t believe that there is any greater witness to the Christ that we serve than to see him at work in us in times of ‘trials and temptations.’

And so, in closing, I lift up to you the ‘doors’ that God ‘opens’ to us in order to ‘Know Christ, and Make Christ Known’: The door of **Scripture...** the door of the **Holy Spirit...** the door of our **Circumstances.** Unlike a popular game show, where you can CHOOSE ‘door #1,’ ‘Door #2,’ or ‘Door #3,’ but only one of them is a winner, you can select any one of these doors and be a WINNER. Each and all of these lead to a VICTORIOUS life in Christ... and to a ‘better YOU.’ Knowing that if Christ opens the door for you, no one can close it. In the words of Paul... who had many doors opened, and closed, for him... ***“my dear friends... continue to work out your***

***salvation ...for it is God who works in you to WILL and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.*** (Phil. 2:12-13) In the name of the One who works in us as we work for Him, may all God's workers say, 'AMEN!'