

OPEN AND CLOSED DOORS

By John Gagliardi



It is always exciting when God opens a door for us, as He did for Paul in Ephesus: “I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me ...” (1 Corinthians 16: 8). Paul clearly discerns that the open door is from God, and that God is expecting him to walk through it.

In this case Paul walks through the door (in spite of opposition that God warns him about). Yet when he was in Troas and God opened a door (2 Corinthians 2: 12, 13), Paul chose not to go through it because he had no peace in his spirit about it, and instead went on to Macedonia.

Obviously, based on Paul’s reaction to these two seemingly similar circumstances, when God presents opportunities as “open doors”, we are not necessarily expected to automatically walk through them, but to pray and use our God-given discernment.

Many times in my Christian walk, I have been faced with circumstances that seem to be “open doors”, but I have walked through them to my own hurt and cost. What I have learned is that just because a circumstance pops up, and looks enticing, it is not necessarily God’s perfect will.

Sometimes it may be the right thing, but at the wrong time – timing is crucial! Other times we think we see an open door, but it can be an alluring “red herring” taking us off our straight path.

I have learned to see circumstances – “open doors” – as just one of the many ways God may be leading us. If I think God is opening a door, I first pray about it and seek a sense of peace in my spirit. If a course of action is God, even it makes no sense to the natural mind, there will be a profound sense of peace and joy in the spirit. If on the other hand I pray and feel a tightness or unease, I back off and wait. It may be the wrong door or it may be the right door but for a later time.

This is exactly the difference in the two doors Paul faces in the Scriptures quoted above – in the Ephesus example, even though God warned him that there would be opposition, he didn’t hesitate to stay in the city for whatever God was putting before him. But in the case of Troas, when a door was opened, he had no peace in his spirit and left for Macedonia.

My personal way of making a decision if I think I perceive an “open door” is first to get quiet and pray. God can and will speak to us if we get quiet before him and listen for the “still, small voice” of the Holy Spirit. As I open my spirit to the Holy Spirit, I start to sense a peace, or I sense unease. I will then get into the Word and see if there is a confirmation in Scripture – and I have had some amazing examples of clear direction from the Word.

Finally, I wait – I have learned (in spite of my naturally impatient personality) to wait and let God build a structure around me that gives me clear leading and guiding. It is not easy if you feel strongly God is leading you – but a wise person once said to me that in God it is better to be “over-ripe” than “green”.

I wait for circumstances – open doors – which will always come if it is really God. God does not bring confusion and disorder; He is a God of order and harmony. The Holy Spirit is always there waiting to lead and guide us, to be the word behind us saying, “this is the way – walk ye in it” (Isaiah 30: 21).

Perhaps I can share a personal example to illustrate what I am trying to say (but this was a personal experience for me – I am not in any way implying that this is how God does it for other people!).

Many years ago I was in Townsville, Australia, where I felt I was having an impact on the community for God. I was the editor of the local newspaper, and as such, could bring a Godly influence in many ways to my local community. I was well-paid, enjoyed the work, and in a word, I was “comfortable” (whoops – some of you already know what is coming – comfort for a Christian can be a dangerous place!).

As I was having my daily quiet time with God early one morning, I sensed – heard in my spirit – a voice telling me to leave that city and job, and move to Brisbane in the southern part of the state, and go to work for a large Christian organization there.

Even as I “heard” – sensed – that quiet whisper in my spirit, my mind rebelled totally! This can’t be God! Look at what I am doing in Townsville – the city’s first-ever born-again Christian newspaper editor, having an impact for God on the community, the local government, my staff, and so on. Plus it was very well paid – and to move to Brisbane to work

for a church, would hit me where it hurts - in the "hip pocket nerve". Nah - `can't be God - must be indigestion or something I ate.

But I opened my Bible at my daily reading, and goose bumps rose on my goose bumps when I read this: "You've stayed long enough at this mountain. Break camp and advance ... see, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land..." Deuteronomy 1: 6-8). Wow! Could God be actually speaking to me through His Word, confirming what the Holy Spirit has already "whispered" to me?

The next thing that happened was that the pastor of the church in Brisbane rang me - "out of the blue" if you like - and offered me a job on his staff in Brisbane. Later he told me that God had spoken to him in his personal prayer time, and had told him to call "that Christian newspaper editor in Townsville" and offer him a job.

This is what I mean when I say circumstances can be a strong confirmation. And underlying everything, even though it made no logical sense in the natural, I had a deep and profound sense of peace that it was God's will for me to move to Brisbane.

This is an intensely personal little anecdote, but a good example of how God can lead us - my human mind said stay in Townsville and be the newspaper editor. It made no sense to move to a new city where I had no influence or connections.

Yet within an amazingly short time, I had been appointed to the governing body of that church, I had spearheaded a major outreach into the former Soviet Union (and was invited to speak to the Russian Parliament), was a keynote speaker at the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship in the Australian Parliament, became founding chairman of Australia's largest Christian university, and founded the very influential Australian Christian Lobby. Not to mention I became part-owner of what became a multi-million dollar international business.

In spite of my misgivings, God wanted me in Brisbane - His ways were not my ways! They were higher than my ways, as the heavens are higher than the earth. I was doing the right thing in the right place at the right time with the right people! If I had stayed in my comfort zone in Townsville, none of the things I have achieved over the last 20 years would have happened!

Dr Steve Wallace looked at the subject of open and closed doors in an article in the Watchman Magazine recently. He says: "The Bible teaches God can open doors by his providence (Acts 14:27; 2 Cor. 2:12; Rev. 3:7-8). God desires that we serve him and he does not leave us unaided. Again and again in his life and travels Paul's heart was gladdened by an open door to preach the Gospel. He found them in various forms in different places. In some instances, an open door presented itself in the form of a synagogue where he could speak to his Jewish brethren (Acts 13:14; 14:1). In other cases he found one on a river bank (Acts 16:13), in a market place (Acts 17:17), the home of a brother (Acts 18:7), a school (Acts 19:9-10), and even a prison (Phlp. 1:12-13; Phmn. 10). God is still operating providentially. Hence, he is still opening doors. It will do well for us all to remember this.

“(But) if we are going to use our time in seeking open doors to the best advantage we must accept that some doors will be closed. When we recognize a door is closed Jesus does not want us to waste time on it (Matt. 10:11-14; Acts 13:44-46; 22:17-18) ... if the door is closed and we have enough information to know it, the Lord expects us to move on (Matt. 7:6).

“The example of Paul’s work in Athens is exemplary here: In spite of how beautiful ancient Athens must have been, the reaction of people there to the Gospel caused him to leave the city and move on (Acts 17:32-18:1). We must take inventory of the results of our efforts and recognize when doors are closed. This may mean moving from one city to another.”

As Dr Wallace stresses above, there can be closed doors as well as open doors – and if a door is closed, what should be do? Knock? Push? Kick it open? After all, don’t the “violent take it by force” (Matthew 11: 12)?

In my opinion, if God opens a door, it will be confirmed in many ways, and there will be no doubt. Equally, if God closes a door, any amount of kicking and pushing and shoving won’t open it.

Jesus tells us to ask, seek and knock – and it will be opened to us (Matthew 7: 7) – but when we ask, we must ask in faith and not be double minded (James 1: 6, 7). God expects us to trust and obey Him and move forward in faith if he opens a door in front of us.

If it is a closed door that looks enticing, don’t waste your time – time is our most valuable and scarce resource. God expects us to be good stewards of the time He gives us.

But if it is an open door, then with the Apostle Paul let us say: “... A great door for effective work has opened to me” (1 Corinthians 16: 9) and let us walk through it in faith and obedience, as the people who know and trust their God will do mighty exploits for Him (Daniel 11: 32).