

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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An Open Door For Effective Ministry

by Dan Trygg

“But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost,⁹ because a wide door for effective ministry (‘in-working’) has opened for me -- yet many oppose me.”

I Corinthians 16:8-9

“When I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ, a door was opened to me by the Lord.”

II Corinthians 2:12

“...pray also for us that God may open a door to us for the word...”

Colossians 4:3

“To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘The Holy One, the True One, the One who has the key of David, who opens and no one will close, and closes and no one opens says: ⁸ I know your works. Because you have a little power, have kept My word, and have not denied My name, look, I have placed before you a door having-been-opened that no one is able to close. ⁹ Take note! I will make those from the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews and are not, but are lying -- note this -- I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and they will know that I have loved you. ¹⁰ Because you have kept My command to endure, I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is going to come over the whole world to test those who live on the earth. ¹¹ I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have, so that no one takes your crown.’”

Revelation 3:7-12

We are coming to the end of summer. Who would have imagined that we would be *here*, a year ago? Who would have imagined that our little group in Stillwater would be *actively partnering with mission outreaches to Native American reservations* in South Dakota, Northern Minnesota, and far up into Northern Canada? Who among us would have imagined the year of *building relationships with our brothers and sisters from Open Arms*, or that *we would be helping them* through this vicious attack against their home base of operations? **If somebody had tried to describe the events of this past year to us, *before they unfolded*, we would not have been able to grasp how these things could come to pass.**

This is like Jesus' words to the disciples in Jerusalem, “You shall take power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you *shall be* My witnesses, both in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth” (Acts 1:8). **I am sure to those 11 men, that prophetic statement must have sounded like a crazy, impossible dream, but *over the next few years*, Jesus' words began to be fulfilled.** The process, however, was anything but smooth! **There were some *exciting times* of growth**, like the Day of Pentecost, and the home meetings that were birthed as a result of that. **Those were *wonderful times*, ...times of *effective ministry* (‘inworking’).** The Greek describes not just the *results*, ...that this ministry was having powerful impact..., but it more clearly delineates what was *causing* that powerful impact. **These were not just “ministry activities”. *God was at work in them!*** The Greek literally means “in-working” (Matt. 14:2; Mk. 6:14; I Cor. 12:6,10,12; Gal. 2:8; 3:5; 5:6; Eph. 1:11,19,20; 3:7,20; 4:16; Phil. 2:13; 3:21; Col. 1:29; 2:12; I Thess. 2:13; Philem. 1:6; Heb. 4:12; Jas. 5:16). *Who* was doing this inner work? It was the activity of God. *What* was He doing? He was transforming hearts and lives. He was answering prayers and even doing miracles.

There was no question that God was doing these things. The Christians knew it. The non-Christian neighbors knew it, ...and brought their sick and needy to the Christians! And even their opponents knew it, ...and were unable to refute it, or stop its spread! However, that didn't stop them from *trying!* They had the apostles arrested, imprisoned them, threatened them, beat them and even killed some of them! What happened? **When the adversaries tried to shut down the ministry of the early church, it just *spread!*** They tried to shut them down in Jerusalem, so they went to Judea and Samaria. **Wherever they went, the ministry was a combination of (1.) *sharing the word*, along with (2.) *God bearing witness to His word by signs, wonders, deliverance from demonic oppression, and dramatic answers to prayer.*** *This* was the “inworking” ministry of God, ...His power operating *within* and *through* these early believers, so that others could unmistakably *see* and *recognize* His hand at work. Eventually, the scattered believers reached gentile cities, and the gospel was shared with non-Jewish people, ...and God continued to display His powerful hand in changing lives, answering prayers, doing supernatural things, so there could be no mistake that it was Him! **The word and the “inworking” activity of God was a powerful combination that fueled the exponential spread of the Christian movement across the Roman Empire in those first few centuries.** The word of God truly *was* living and active (“inworking”). **God was *backing up* His word**, with signs, wonders, gifts of the Spirit, and powerful answers to prayer (Heb. 2:3,4), ...so people would recognize that *this had to be God!!*

Let's take a look at the passages at the top of this page. The first one is from I Corinthians 16:8,9. Paul is writing from Ephesus, where he reports that, though he was planning to visit the Corinthians, *he was going to delay for a time.* Why? Because “**a door has been opened for me, great and inworking, ...and many are set against me.**” I know that is not the way it is translated in the version listed above (HCSB), but it *is* what the Greek actually

says. Why do most of the translations render it as a “wide door for effective ministry”? Because that is smoother English, and requires less explanation. Unfortunately, it also means that we miss out on some of the peculiar nuances of the original inspired writing. First of all, we have the simple statement that Paul was staying there for a time, because “a door has been opened for me”. The Greek means that the door *was opened* and *remains open*. It doesn’t tell us who or how it was opened, but the implication is that God did this. When you compare the other passages, it is quite clear that **this is a word picture commonly used in the early church**. In every other case, it is explicitly stated that it was the Lord who opened the door, so it would seem justifiable to assume that Paul meant the same thing here. **God had opened a door, and it was still open! For that reason, Paul was going to remain at Ephesus, ...for now.** What about this door? **It was not just a door, ...it was a great, large, or wide door.** If a door means an opportunity to share the gospel, this was not just a typical such opening for Paul to preach and teach. This was a BIG, HUGE, LARGE or GREAT opportunity. That is why Paul didn’t want to leave right then. This was a GREAT OPPORTUNITY! **And more than that, it was an “inworking” opportunity, ...one that God was actively moving in.** His power and activity were present and demonstrating the reality of His Kingdom, and accrediting them as spokespeople for God. So, Paul couldn’t just walk away from that! God was opening people’s hearts, and He was showing His love and power. Paul was “in the zone”, and he was going to score as much as he could while this opportunity was available. **But note, “and there are many set against” this advance of the Kingdom of God.** This is always the way it happens. When God begins to move, and people are responding, *Satan and his minions try to motivate people to oppose it or cripple it in some way.* **Here, it was probably direct persecution, but sometimes it comes through temptation and sin, or through false teachers, or religious charlatans.** Paul told these very Ephesians that **savage wolves would come in from the outside to attack them, and people from among them would rise up to attempt to lead people astray** (Acts 20:29,30). Sound familiar? The preacher from Ecclesiastes observed, “There is nothing new under the sun” (1:9).

The second passage, also to the Corinthians, mentioned how **when Paul came to Troas, “a door was opened to me by the Lord.”** This visit is not recorded for us in the book of Acts, although Paul visited Troas on two occasions there (16:8-12; 20:5,6). Neither of these seems to fit the timeline described by Paul here. Troas was the chief sea port between Asia Minor and Macedonia, so it is not surprising that Paul would have been there several times in his journeys back and forth. In this case, Paul had written a “severe letter” to the Corinthians, and was eager to hear how they had responded. When he came to Troas to preach the gospel, and God had even “opened a door for the word”, Paul could not find rest in his spirit, so he *left his team there* and went on to Macedonia, in search of Titus. Though this offers us a very personal glimpse into Paul’s shepherd heart, for our purposes here, we observe that God is the one who opens “a door” so we can effectively preach the word. **Note that Paul kept his team working where God was working.**

The third occurrence of this phrase is in Colossians 4:3. There, **Paul asked the Colossians to pray that “God may open up for us a door for the word...”** *Note where he is. He is in prison!* Even there, he was *praying*, and *asking others to pray*, that God might open up a door, an opportunity, to speak about Christ. **Clearly, Paul believed that these opportunities are created or brought about by God, and often in answer to our prayers.**

The final passage is the most direct and clear. It is in a letter dictated by Christ to the church at Philadelphia in Asia Minor (Rev. 3:7-12). It is one of seven letters to churches of that area, and the only letter written that has only commendation for the church. **Jesus identifies Himself as “the One who has the key of David, ...who opens and no one can shut, and closes and no one can open...”** He commends the church for what they had done, and how they had been faithful and obedient. He says, “Behold, I have given before you a door having-been-opened which no one is able to shut, ...because you have a little power, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.” **They were not a large or powerful group in any way, ...in numbers, wealth or worldly influence..., but they did possess a little power or ability from God.** The Greek adjective for “little” is the word we get “micron” from. It means “a very little or insignificant amount, small, lowly”. **Because they were yielded and obedient to God, their “little power” could be used in a mighty way.** As God told Paul, in II Corinthians 12:9, “My grace is sufficient for you, for the power is completed/fulfilled in weakness.” Paul understood that to mean that when we recognize and boast in our weaknesses, then the power of Christ dwells in us. God *loves* to take the weak and powerless and fill them with His great power, so it is most apparent that the work accomplished is *God at work* within that person (I Cor. 1:26-29). Here, **the church at Philadelphia had only a little power, ...and they knew it..., but Jesus challenged them with having granted to them an open door, ...a door of ministry that He has propped open..., and no one could shut it.** They just needed to *step into* the opportunity, *go forth* in faith and confidence that *God* would open hearts, change lives, answer prayers, and act in powerful ways. **God would open opportunities to share, and He would be actively “inworking” to make the message clear and credible.**

Furthermore, **Jesus says that He will make those religious oppressors, who have harassed them, bow down at their feet,** and recognize that He has loved His true, faithful servants. **God will bring about justice for His children.**