

An Encouraging Word

By Tom Cox



Open Doors and Hardships

The apostle Paul makes an interesting statement in 1 Cor. 16:8-9: "But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me."

In assessing the situation, Paul seems to take a very different approach from most people who talk about open doors that the Lord has set before them. Usually, we consider an open door to be a case where all difficulties have been removed. We think that the easiest path forward must be the way that God wants us to take. However, that is not always the case.

Paul doesn't clue us in on exactly what kind of opportunity was made available to him, nor does he elaborate on the nature of the opposition he was facing. But he does set forth a biblical principle that seems to go against popular thought—

sometimes the door that God opens for us is not the path of least resistance. In fact, the way God wants us to go might be the most difficult of the choices that lie before us.

I heard a story about a family who relocated because of a career change. They were Christians, so, of course, they immediately began to search for a Bible-believing congregation in their area where they could worship and serve the Lord. They planned to visit four churches before choosing one to be their new home congregation.

The first church they visited stood out because of its clear presentation of the Bible. The sermon was interesting, relevant, and solidly based on Scripture. The Sunday School lesson was well prepared, and the discussion remained focused on the Word of God. The children were able to discuss what they learned on the ride home. The parents were

quite impressed with this church.

The next Sunday, the family attended a church that had a wonderful music program. The songs were inspiring, easy to sing along with, and based on biblical truth. They could tell that the singers and musicians had spent a lot of time in preparation for the worship service. This church, like the first one, seemed to be a good candidate for their new church home.

The third church they visited had a wonderful youth program, with full-time ministers for both young children and teenagers. There were plenty of volunteers who led different programs that provided opportunities for fun and learning for children of all ages. This congregation also appeared to be a good choice for their new church family.

The fourth and final congregation that the family attended was an interesting

experience, to say the least. The worship service was poorly planned, the preacher seemed to struggle through his sermon, and the Sunday School program did not appear to be well organized. The people were friendly enough, but church life there seemed to be a bit chaotic.

When the parents got home that afternoon, it was time to make their decision. The husband and wife talked about the pros and cons of each congregation and made their choice. They decided that the fourth congregation needed their help more than the others did. They did not choose the easy path, but rather the more difficult one.

Sometimes the door that God opens will not lead you to an easier life, but to a harder one. Always keep that in mind as you make decisions along the way in your journey with Jesus.

For more inspirational writings by Tom Cox, go to www.jesustrek.wordpress.com.

Kinniconick Homemakers

By Donna Carver

The Kinniconick Homemakers met on Tuesday, March 10, at 12 noon at the home of Ruby Rayburn. Our hostess, Donna Carver, gave the blessing for the delicious meal of pork tenderloin, dressing, mashed potatoes and gravy, peas, salad, homemade rolls, and banana cream pie.

After the meal, President Leoma Rigdon called the meeting to order with the Pledge of Allegiance. For the devotional, Ruby Hord read "A Homemaker" by Sue Staton of Clark County. Sue shared her memories of attending homemakers meetings with her mother as a young girl. Her love of crafts, cooking, baking, and giving back to the community inspired her to become a homemaker as an adult.

Following the devotional, Donna Carver read the minutes of the last meeting, which were approved. Roll call was conducted, the treasury report was given, and club dues and "Coins for Change" were collected. The meeting was then turned over to the president, who discussed the following new business:

Skills Day — Thursday, April 9, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Bath County Extension Office. The cost is \$4 plus class fees. Some of the classes include Front Porch Doormat, Swedish Weaving, Flag Painting, Crochet a Scrubby, Rabbit Topiary, Watering Can Door Hanger, and more.

After the discussion of new business, Donna Carver presented the lesson, "Stretching Your Dollars." Making ends meet is becoming harder in today's economy. You can start by examining your spending habits and deciding what you want versus what you need. When times are tough, it may be necessary to purchase only essentials. Prioritizing your finances is an important step. Divide your expenses into fixed and variable costs. Fixed costs remain the same each month, such as mortgage and car payments. Variable costs

change monthly, such as food, utilities, and revolving credit. Work on reducing expenses in each category. As you look for ways to save, consider the penny-pinching practices of past generations. They lived within their means, and we may need to learn from them.

After the lesson, members played a game to see how many words could be formed from "St. Patrick's Day," with Ruby Hord declared the winner. Surprise birthday gifts were presented to Ruby Rayburn and her daughters, Marsha Wells and Karen Edwards. Ruby, the club's oldest member at 93 years old, is graciously supported by her daughters, who beautifully decorate the table each month and make it possible for the group to meet at her home. Happy birthday, ladies—we love you!

The meeting was adjourned with plans to meet again on April 14 at noon at the home of Ruby Rayburn.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR



WAKE UP, CHURCH — HELL IS LAUGHING

I think every Christian can admit we are living in the end times, and now is not the time to play church. Every believer in Jesus has a mandate to witness and represent Him. What I see is a whole lot of Sunday morning Christians who go plop themselves in a church pew every week and call themselves Christians, but there is zero fruit.

I can go sit in a garage all day and call myself a car, but that will never make me a car. We have far too many professed Christians who are anything but Christians. There is an epidemic of gossipers in our churches, and I am calling it out by giving you the words of Jesus on this neglected subject, which is causing so much damage to the Kingdom of God. It is repulsive to God, and obviously, preachers are not feeding their congregations meat, or there would not be so many members walking out of church on Sunday and choosing to talk like the devil all week.

James 1:26 says: "If any man among you seems to be religious, and brideth not his tongue but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain."

This should concern those who choose every day to slander, insult, talk about people, cause problems for others, and look down on them. Those who are meddling busybodies have deceived themselves into thinking that somehow they will make it to heaven. It says your religion is vain—meaning futile, without purpose, and doing no good for anyone.

Proverbs 11:9 says: "A hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbor; but through knowledge shall the just be delivered."

This is my hope: that if you are a gossip—or even worse, a champion gossip—who claims to be a child of God and follower of Jesus, these truths will deliver you from that spirit you have embraced.

This is what Jesus said in Matthew 12:36:

"But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."

The KJV strongly warns against slander or gossip, describing them as destructive evils that break friendships and carry consequences. There will be consequences for your gossip, insults, criticism, and meddling.

Matthew 25:32-33 says:

"When the Son of man comes in His glory, He will gather all nations and divide them, setting the sheep on His right hand and the goats on the left."

You will be one of the goats telling the Lord that you went to church every week and paid your tithes, and He will look at you and say, "Depart from me; I never knew you." That, to me, is the most terrifying scripture in the Bible.

You can put on a church face for people, but you cannot do that with God. He knows everything—the secret intents of your heart and your motives. You cannot con or fool Jesus. You cannot sneak in the back door of heaven.

If you are a Christian whose language is slander, criticism, insults, and gossip, and you meddle in others' lives and business and do not feel convicted, I am concerned for you. You need to rededicate your life to Christ, because you are not saved. He chastens those He loves, so if you live this way and do not feel conviction, then you have what the Bible calls a seared conscience and vain religion.

You need to be accountable and repent, which means to "turn away from." You must be intentional in controlling your speech. I suggest you read this every day, and when you feel the urge to use your mouth to glorify evil, read this again.

This is what I see: people marching off to church, taking God out of the spiritual toy box, playing with Him for an hour and a half, and then putting Him away the rest of the week—talking and acting like the enemy of God while claiming to be a child of God. It is unacceptable.

You may be the only witness someone has. How sad will it be on judgment day when the Lord says to you that you pushed people toward hell with your poor witness?

I also want to remind the "children of God" that you are not any better than anyone else, and that pompous, arrogant attitude I have witnessed is extremely offensive to Jesus. Go read the story of the Pharisee's prayer versus the sinner's prayer.

People tend to focus only on God's mercy and love, and those things are absolute, but they forget He is a holy, righteous, and just God.

In the words of Jesus to the Pharisees:

"You are like white-washed tombs, beautiful on

the outside but inside full of dead men's bones and every impurity."

He also called them pretenders, hypocrites, and vipers—over and over. You are not immune to these words. When you live this way, you are contradicting everything Jesus stood for and died for. You are acting like a Pharisee, and I say shame on you.

Every sign given of His return has been fulfilled, and we need to take as many with us as we can. It is time to act and talk like a Christian.

Leviticus 19:16 says: "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people."

I grew up in a church full of Pharisees and gossipers. They gossiped before service, then gathered in their little cliques in the parking lot afterward and gossiped some more. As a child, two of those "faithful servants," who never missed a church service, also never missed a chance to gossip and tear people down.

These were also my neighbors, and this was their daily behavior—insulting others, gossiping, and meddling in everyone's business. This is why God warns older women, especially widows, to be careful not to fall into gossip. Get a hobby. Spend time in the Word. Do not just go to church and let the preacher spoon-feed you.

Do not think this behavior does not matter. You just read what Jesus said. If you truly love Him, you will repent and even apologize to people if needed. I recommend apologizing to any sinner you have behaved this way in front of, because they may blame Jesus for your behavior—and that is not right.

He called you to represent Him, not misrepresent Him.

If you are offended by this, take it up with Jesus—He said it.

I pray this will change the hearts of many who read this, and that many will repent of these destructive evils and put on love.

Remember His Word: "Love thy neighbor."

I want to clarify that all of us struggle with our words at times. None of us are perfect, and that is okay—Jesus' blood covers us. But this message is for those who claim Him and intentionally hurt His people every day through gossip and insults as a lifestyle.

This is for those Jesus spoke to—those who make it a habit to degrade others, talk down to people, and refuse to mind their own busi-

ness, believing they are better than others while rejecting His command to love their neighbor.

We do not have much longer. It could happen at any time. I suggest everyone enjoy every moment and all the blessings God has given you. Spend your time in gratitude rather than gossip and insults—worrying about things that do not affect you and are none of your business.

For those who think they are better than others, remember: God can take your blessings in the blink of an eye.

You will reap what you sow—whether here or in eternity. So sow good seed for Jesus, remembering He sees all, knows all, and nothing escapes His all-seeing eye—El Roi, the God who sees.

We need a reverential fear resurrected in the church and the world.

Jesus is the Lamb, but He is also the Lion.

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