

Decision Making and the Will of God

Lesson 7: Has God Provided an Opportunity? Open and Closed Doors -- 1 Corinthians 16:5-9 (with Acts 16:6-10)

Few phrases get tossed around in Christian decision making as casually as “open door” and “closed door.” A job comes through unexpectedly and we say God opened a door. A deal falls apart and we say God closed one. The parking spot, the cancelled flight, the chance encounter, all of it gets read like tea leaves, as though every circumstance were a coded message spelling out God’s secret will. The instinct behind this is not all wrong. God really does govern our circumstances. But the way we often use these phrases turns providence into a kind of fortune-telling, and that can lead us badly astray.

So we come to the seventh question in wise decision making: Has God provided an opportunity? It is a real and important question. Opportunity is one of the genuine factors a believer weighs. If a door is shut, you usually cannot walk through it; if a door stands open, it may be that God has provided a way. Paul himself thought this way. Writing to Corinth, he explains his travel plans by saying, “I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me.” An open door mattered to Paul. He took it into account.

But notice what Paul says in the very same breath: “for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.” The open door came with fierce opposition. Paul did not assume that because there was a door, the way would be easy, nor did he assume that because there were adversaries, the door must not be from God. He held opportunity and difficulty together and used wisdom to weigh them. That single verse quietly corrects two of our most common mistakes: treating ease as God’s green light and treating hardship as His stop sign.

We will also look at a famous scene in Acts, where God redirected Paul away from Asia and toward Macedonia. It is a powerful picture of God opening and closing doors in His providence. But we will handle it carefully, because the way God guided Paul there, by direct revelation and a vision given to an apostle, is not the everyday way God guides you and me. The lesson is this: take opportunity seriously as one factor among many, trust that God truly governs your circumstances, and refuse the superstition that reads every open or closed door as a secret instruction. An open door is an invitation to wisdom, not a substitute for it.

Group Discussion: How have you heard people use the language of “open doors” and “closed doors” in their decisions? As a group, talk about what is right in that instinct and what can go wrong with it. Why is it dangerous to treat every circumstance as a coded message from God, and how might we think about opportunity more wisely?

Personal Reflection: Think about a time you described something as an open or closed door. Looking back, were you weighing a real opportunity with wisdom, or were you reading a circumstance like a secret sign? Is there an open or closed door in front of you right now? How might you weigh it as one factor among many this week, rather than as an automatic command?

Read 1 Corinthians 16:5–9 and Acts 16:6–10

Study Questions

1. Paul lays out his travel plans in detail, yet adds, “I will do this if the Lord permits” (vv. 5–7). What does this teach about making real plans as a Christian? How do we hold together genuine planning and humble submission to God’s overruling will?
2. Be honest about how you hold your own plans. Do you tend to grip them too tightly, as if they were certain, or do you refuse to plan at all and call it faith? What would “if the Lord permits” actually change about the way you make plans this week?
3. Paul explains a decision by saying, “a wide door for effective work has opened to me” (v. 9). What does it mean that an opportunity, an open door, is a real factor in a believer’s decisions? Why is opportunity worth weighing without being treated as an automatic command?
4. What open door or opportunity is in front of you right now? Have you honestly weighed it as one factor among many, or either ignored it or treated it as a guaranteed sign of God’s will? What would wise consideration of it look like?
5. In the same sentence Paul says the open door came “and there are many adversaries” (v. 9). What does it tell us that a God-given opportunity can come with serious opposition? How does this correct the assumption that an easy path means God’s approval and a hard path means His disapproval?
6. Where have you misread difficulty as a closed door, or ease as God’s green light? Think of a specific decision. How might it have gone differently if you had not assumed that hardship meant no and convenience meant yes?
7. In Acts 16, God redirected Paul away from Asia and Bithynia and toward Macedonia (vv. 6–10). What does this account teach about God’s providence in opening and closing the doors of our circumstances? How is God’s governing of our path a comfort even when we cannot see what He is doing?
8. Recall a door that closed in your life, a plan that fell through, a way that was barred. How did you interpret it at the time? Looking back now, can you see God’s hand in it differently than you did then?
9. Scripture shows God truly governing our circumstances (Acts 16), yet an open door came to Paul alongside many adversaries (1 Cor. 16:9), and the dramatic way God led Paul in Acts 16, by direct revelation and a vision to an apostle, is not the everyday way He guides us. So how should a Christian rightly read open and closed doors? How do we take opportunity seriously as one factor weighed by wisdom, without treating circumstances as coded instructions or expecting visions and inner voices to direct us?

10. Look back across 1 Corinthians 16:5–9 and Acts 16:6–10. Paul planned wisely, weighed an open door, faced adversaries, and trusted a God who governs the way. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these passages. What is the single truth here that you most need to carry into your next decision?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Proverbs 16:9, the heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps; James 4:13–15, making plans humbly under “if the Lord wills”; Colossians 4:3, praying that God would open a door for the word; Revelation 3:7–8, the One who opens and no one shuts, who shuts and no one opens, setting before His people an open door; Acts 14:27, God opening a door of faith to the nations

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