



FOCUS VERSE

Revelation 3:8

I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

LESSON TEXT

Acts 2:17-21

17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

18 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:

19 And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke:

20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come:

21 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved

Galatians 6:1-10

1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

2 Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

3 For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

4 But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.

5 For every man shall bear his own burden.

6 Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.

7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

8 For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

9 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

10 As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.



FOCUS THOUGHT

Believers should be sensitive to the direction of the Spirit as opportunity may knock only once.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Life with a GPS

I'm one of those people who use the GPS function on my smartphone to navigate everywhere. Well, "everywhere" is an exaggeration, but if I don't drive there at least once a week (and if my wife, the human GPS, isn't in the car) I need the reassurance of "in three hundred feet turn left" in order to encourage me that at least one of us knows where I am. However, in familiar territory I have favorite pathways along which I know the traffic patterns and problem intersections. I take these tried and proven paths even when the GPS warns me they are not the fastest or shortest ways to get to my destinations. The digital

voice saying "recalculating" and "in one hundred feet, make a U-turn" reassures me that I am not a slave to technology—freewill is still possible in a digitally deterministic universe. Navigation software is a tool, not a tyrant.

While God is not a tool, He is also not a tyrant. He works together with our free will to guide us in our life paths. We should pay close attention when He tells us to make a U-turn, but otherwise He leaves the details up to us. Christians do not mindlessly follow programmed paths of life, but neither do we obliviously wander without a map and a destination.

OUTLINE

I. OPEN DOORS TO SERVE

- A. Walking in God's Will
- B. Serving One Another
- C. Serving the Body of Christ

II. OPEN DOORS TO IMPACT OUR WORLD

- A. Witnessing to Others
- B. Witnessing with Our Lifestyle

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

In his 1930 novel, *The 42nd Parallel*, John Dos Passos wrote, "Opportunity knocks but once." This saying has been repeated until it has become a part of American folk wisdom. The sentiment of the quotation echoes a Roman proverb from about 8 AD: "When you see an opportunity to improve your lot, act quickly and resolutely—you may never get another chance." However, the Christian need not wait for opportunities just to happen along. As Francis Bacon wrote in *Wise Words and Wives' Tales*, "A wise man will make more opportunities than he finds."

The Christian life is full of opportunities. Believers need only be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and cognizant of their particular gifts, talents, abilities, and callings to become

aware of a wealth of opportunities for the more abundant life in Christ.

Blaise Pascal famously offered an argument known as Pascal's Wager. He pointed out that if Christians are right, they gain an eternity of wondrous blessings while the unbeliever is destined for an eternity of suffering. But if unbelievers are the ones who are right, they are faced with a brief life of hardships followed by nothingness while the Christian has enjoyed a life of hope, good works, and meaning beyond oneself. Even if that hope ultimately proves to be false, the Christian is better off for living in its warmth, and the world is better off because Christians lived. Thus Christians have everything to gain and nothing to lose, while unbelievers have nothing to gain and everything to lose. That is opportunity!

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. OPEN DOORS TO SERVE

If personal salvation were the ultimate purpose for a Christian's life, then the greatest blessing would be to die shortly after our initial salvation experience. That most of us live for decades after that initial experience is a clear indication those years are to be filled with living as a Christian rather than simply existing

until our final reward. In other words, simply being a Christian is a worthy end for us, but for God it is a means by which He brings about much greater ends. The Christian lives for Christ and not for self. And living for Christ means living for others.

One does not need to be a Christian to know that lives of service are the most admirable and meaningful lives, while lives lived only for self are empty and unfulfilling. Every society celebrates those who make the sacrifices necessary to serve others. This is part of the image of God within humanity. In the person of Jesus Christ, we see God's perspective concerning the inestimable worth of each human being and His willing sacrifice to meet the needs of others.

A. Walking in God's Will

One of the most frequent questions Christians, especially young Christians, ask is how to discern the will of God for their lives. God does speak a specific calling into the spirit of every Christian. That calling is often associated with a specific plan for the moment or a general direction for life. This does not mean we should wait for a miraculous sign, thundering voice, or overwhelming anointing before entering Christian service. God's will for believers is clearly presented in His Word. Until we are willing to accept the general will of God for all believers, we are not ready to receive His specific will for our lives or current situation.

The Bible provides abundant evidence that Christian service is just that—service. Jesus taught, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve" (Luke 22:25–26). God inverts the sinful human social structure so Christian leadership is vested in those willing to become slaves. Jesus is our great model of humble servitude while Lucifer is the model of prideful self-centeredness. Maybe the citizens of Thessalonica were wrong when they said the Christians "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). Rather, they should have said that Christians turned the world downside up. The church lifts up

those who are weak, destitute, powerless, and forgotten by society. "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty" (1 Corinthians 1:27).

B. Serving One Another

Christian service begins with one's own household. In the design of God's kingdom, father or mother are greater callings than pastor or missionary. "For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" (1 Timothy 3:5). In the verse just quoted, the concept of ruling is expressed by a Greek word that means to go before as a guide, protector, and caregiver (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*).

Paul was clear about the spiritual condition of overzealous Christians who sacrifice the well-being of their families. "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Timothy 5:8). We easily see the wickedness in neglecting the needs of the church while seeking our own ease and comfort, but to go to the opposite extreme is worse than spiritual infidelity. How evil it would be to be known for an excellent Christian witness to neighbors while neglecting the spiritual upbringing of our own children. How sinful it would be to give sacrificially to the financial needs of the church while being tightfisted and miserly with one's spouse.

As we fulfill the spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical needs of our own household, we must then look to those needs within the household of faith. Galatians 6:2 tells us that we fulfill the law of Christ by bearing one another's burdens. The burdens mentioned here no doubt include any of the numerous trials and pressures of daily life together with the added struggles of spiritual warfare. We help bear these burdens by cultivating in our lives godly characteristics such as those listed in Romans 12:9–18:

"Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; not slothful

in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."

Galatians 6:9–10 instructs us that rather than becoming "weary in well doing" we should take advantage of opportunities to "do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." In the previous chapter, the author called for love to be the motivating force behind our relationships within the church: "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Galatians 5:13–14). It is this active display of selfless love to one another that Jesus said would be the greatest Christian witness: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35).

The responsibility for giving loving service to our Christian brothers and sisters becomes even more urgent when they face failure as a result of the difficulty of life's trials and temptations. Galatians 6:1 urges us, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one." This restoration does not occur through haughty confrontation but "in the spirit of meekness" because when we truthfully consider ourselves, we realize how easy it is to "also be tempted." "For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself" (Galatians 6:3).

Restoring an erring brother or sister is the greatest act of loving service one can perform for the household of God. Because he expressed this godly trait, Joses the Levite was renamed Barnabas by the apostles (Acts

4:36), and he later performed the extremely significant services of vouching for Paul before the elders of the church (Acts 9:27) and restoring Mark to the ministry after his failure at Pamphylia (Acts 15:37–38 with II Timothy 4:11). Being a restorer requires a significant level of maturity, humility, empathy, and grace. But the most childlike among us can learn to separate the offense from the offender so we may offer nonjudgmental love and mercy for the erring brother while "hating even the garment spotted by the flesh" (Jude 23). For "some," we are to "have compassion, making a difference. And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire" (Jude 22–23). As believers, we have the authority to come against the powers of darkness on behalf of our brother or sister.

C. Serving the Body of Christ

The list of the spiritual gifts in I Corinthians 12:8–10, 28 is found within the context of the unity of the body of Christ. Together we are one body made up of many members, each member supplying the needs of the body while the body supplies the life of the member. As presented here and in other scriptural passages, the church is intended to include great diversity in talents, preferences, tastes, skills, abilities, and manifestations of the Spirit. Surrounding that diversity is great unity. All members of the body enrich and strengthen the body through those unique sets of individual characteristics only they can supply.

Many believers seem to have difficulties discovering those gifts and callings God has placed in their lives, but it is really not such a mystery. God does not call eyes to become feet or kidneys to become noses. Our gifts and callings are suited to what we are by nature, once the sinful nature is disregarded. Our gifts and callings come from a combination of inherited biology, social environment, and God's gracious gifts. If we have an interest in and drive to work with our hands or with our minds, to sculpt or to write, to travel or to bring up a family, these can be signs of our callings and the gifts God has provided to fulfill that call. It is not His purpose to override our wills but to free our wills from the chains of sin. Thus, whether we have chosen to be a dentist or a ditch digger, a painter or a professor, a

machinist or a musician, we are to use that vocation to serve the body of Christ. “That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another” (I Corinthians 12:25).

That is not to say people do not make mistakes in matching their God-given talents and abilities to their profession, or even that everyone has the same opportunity and natural capacity to develop their gifts into a vocation. That is where reliance on the guidance of the Spirit and wise counsel from pastors, mentors, and teachers becomes important. Development of our talents and abilities will require discipline, determination, patience, struggle with self-doubt, overcoming laziness, and a significant investment of time and personal resources. However, like a mother’s birth pangs, these are far outweighed by the joy of bringing forth our callings. And like a birth, it signifies decades of further development ahead as our callings mature.

From the preceding explanation, it should be clear that as we change in who we are due to experience and maturation, there will be changes in the way God uses us to serve the church and society. While God never changes His mind about the gifts and callings He bestows (Romans 11:29), He often adds additional talents and callings for those who prove faithful initially (Zechariah 4:10; Matthew 25:21). We are commanded to “covet earnestly the best gifts” (I Corinthians 12:31). The best gifts are those that meet the present needs of the body (I Corinthians 12:17–19) as motivated by sacrificial love (I Corinthians 13).

II. OPEN DOORS TO IMPACT OUR WORLD

A. Witnessing to Others

In Acts 1:8, Jesus predicted, “Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” This verse serves as an outline of the early spread of the gospel recorded in the Book of Acts. As geographic designations, we also see the pattern of our witness starting in our own communities and then radiating out through surrounding areas until we reach the entire world. However, this verse also demonstrates a deeper

pattern of witness. To fully understand what these four geographic designations meant to Jesus’ hearers requires some background information.

Jerusalem is the well-known name of the metropolitan area that served as the capital of Palestine. As the center of Jewish worship, Jerusalem represented the Jewish race as a people in covenant with God. Jesus used the term in this way in Matthew 23:34–39. Thus Jerusalem represented the people of God and the place where they worshiped. For us, this signifies our duty to be witnesses to our local church.

One area of Christian witness that is often neglected is our witness to each other. It is vitally important that we exhort one another to abound more and more in a walk pleasing to God (I Thessalonians 4:1). Our witness to the church is accomplished through the Christian lifestyle characterized by the commands found in Colossians 3:15–17:

“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”

It is also accomplished through our individual (and often private) acts of love and good works in service to each other (Hebrews 10:24).

Judea means “Land of the Jews” and was the name of the province of the Persian Empire later known as Palestine and Syria. When the land was incorporated into the Roman Empire, Israel was divided into three provinces, including Judea. The Romans later applied the name to the kingdom of Herod the Great. By the time of Jesus (and for the next several centuries), “Judea” was commonly used to refer to the entire Palestinian territory, including the Herodian kingdom and the provinces of Galilee and Samaria. Secular writers such as Strabo, Tacitus, and Philo used the term in this

way, as did the people Luke quoted in Luke 23:5, Acts 10:37, and Acts 26:20. Thus, Judea represents the broader community of fellow believers.

For us, this would indicate our responsibility to be witnesses to Oneness Pentecostals. Our witness to fellow Apostolics includes, for example, supporting district-wide, national, and international projects, providing assistance to fellow believers and congregations facing natural disasters or poverty, and taking advantage of opportunities to show brotherly love and understanding to those in other Apostolic movements.

Samaria was another Roman province of Palestine, but more importantly it was settled by Gentiles who converted to Judaism after the Assyrian Captivity. II Kings 17:24–28 records how the Assyrians settled people from Babylon and other nations in Samaria after deporting most of the Jews. The Assyrian emperor then sent a Jewish priest to teach these new residents how to worship the God of the land. Over time, the Samaritans considered themselves to be true Israelites (John 4:12), descendants of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (II Chronicles 34:9). They came into political and religious conflict with those Jews who settled in Judea after returning from captivity (Ezra 4:11–16; Nehemiah 4:1–6).

This conflict continued to escalate when the Samaritans built a temple to Jehovah on Mount Gerizim (John 4:20) and helped the Jewish exiles in Egypt build another temple at Elephantine. Samaritans believed the Jews had corrupted true Judaism while in Babylon and that the Jerusalem temple was a cultic center for false worship (Luke 9:51–53). A few years before the boyhood visit of Jesus to the Jerusalem temple, Samaritan terrorists desecrated it by spreading human bones on the porches and in the sanctuary, perhaps in revenge for the destruction of the Samaritan temple by a Jewish army over a century earlier. (David Carlson, “Samaritans,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*.)

We see what Jesus thought about the animosity that existed between Jews and Samaritans when we read of Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4), His praise for the Samaritan leper He had healed (Luke 17:11–19), and His parable of

the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29–37). Clearly, Jesus objected to the hostility between the two sects (Luke 9:55) and was willing to minister to the Samaritans (John 4:40) even though He knew the error of their doctrines (John 4:22; Matthew 10:5; Luke 17:18). Witnessing to Samaria represents to us our witness to non-Apostolic Christians. Our relationships with fellow Christians are not to be full of hostility. The deviations of other Christian traditions from the apostle’s doctrines will yield much more easily to loving humility than prideful antagonism. Animosity can be disarmed by Spirit-led peacemakers who are willing to become Christ-like witnesses to the “Samaritans” along their life paths.

Finally, the “uttermost part of the earth” represents our witness to those of other faiths or no religious faith. Everyone needs our Christian witness in word and deed. We must learn to take advantage of opportunities God places in our daily lives to love, befriend, serve, and inform others as the ambassadors of Christ.

In our busy modern society, this is not a simple task. Few people can even begin to meet the level of acceptance and warmth demonstrating true Christianity without reliance on the Holy Spirit. Many Christians witness out of a sense of obligation, selfish expectation of reward, or a feeling of paternalistic superiority. Some are naturally gregarious and enjoy opening themselves to strangers while others are terrified of such encounters and have difficulty making new friends. God can use the introvert, the social gadfly, and every type of person in between. Although each believer is not personally responsible for reaching the world, all believers are collectively responsible. We can use our particular gifts, talents, abilities, resources, and callings to assist the church in reaching the world.

B. Witnessing with Our Lifestyle

The Christian lifestyle is first and foremost marked by loving service to others. God has called us to a life of self-sacrifice. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

A sheep or bullock was just an animal, a piece of property hardly different than a

vineyard or an orchard to its owner. But when that animal became a sacrifice, it was transformed into something holy—a connection between God and man and a conduit for forgiveness from sins. A simple four-legged beast became a figure for the Savior of the world.

For this age, the church is the connection between God and man, ordained to reveal Christ to the world. When we present ourselves as living sacrifices, God declares us holy and acceptable and uses us to bring forgiveness. The extraordinary thing is that we are called to be living sacrifices. Those who never become sacrifices are never truly living.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

On the birthday of the church, Peter quoted Joel 2:28–32 as part of his text for the first evangelistic sermon of the church age:

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: and I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: the sun shall be turned

into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:17–21).

The church age is an unprecedented period of opportunity for service to the Lord. Regardless of our ethnicity (all flesh), gender (sons and daughters), age (young and old), or social standing (servants and handmaidens), God has called us and empowered us by His Spirit to meet the needs around us. He will place His seal of approval upon our service through wonders and signs in the heavens and the earth. To the saints belongs the time “before that great and notable day of the Lord,” and during this period “whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

True joy comes not from serving our own desires for temporary happiness, but from giving ourselves wholeheartedly to serving others in the name of Christ. The Christian life of service is the most fulfilling, rewarding, and significant life possible. The Christian lives for Christ and not for self. And living for Christ means living for others. Opportunities to make a true and eternal difference in this world surround us. Our Lord stands ready to guide us and empower us as we claim those opportunities for Him. We should not just belong to a church; we should be the church! ■

REFLECTIONS

- How do we reconcile the believers’ responsibility to care for their own households (1 Timothy 5:8) with Christ’s words in Matthew 10:34–36 and Luke 14:26?
- Given that we all have limited resources of time, finances, and emotional capital, how are believers to prioritize good works and charitable giving among the numerous demands of the family, church, and work? Is it ever proper to completely neglect one in favor of another?
- Discuss specific ways in which you as a believer fulfill your godly calling through your personal interests, talents, and profession.
- Provide examples of opportunities and difficulties in witnessing to each of the following groups: the local church (Jerusalem), the Apostolic community (Judea), non-Apostolic Christians (Samaria), and non-Christians (the uttermost).
- A life of Christian service to others is a rewarding sacrifice. But is it Christian service if performed out of a sense of obligation or a desire for personal reward? Discuss.
- Provide some specific examples of opportunities you as a Christian have to become the church in the world.