

LESSON 1

STUDY ONE

GOD OPENS DOORS

INTRODUCTION

The Bible is filled with word-pictures to help us understand the messages of God's Word. Consider the wonderful messages we learn when Jesus describes himself with the word-picture **GOOD SHEPHERD**. Or, when Paul helps us understand how the church should function with the word-picture of the **BODY** to describe the unity and diversity of Christ's church. Bible word-pictures help us understand God's Word and apply those truths to our everyday lives.



In this session we use a word-picture to help us get in the message of the book of Acts. Acts is a fascinating book. And, as we will discover, it is much more than a history of the growth of the early church.

To introduce us to the book of Acts, and especially its mission focus, consider the word-picture **OPEN DOORS**. That word-picture is in use in Acts and elsewhere in the New Testament to focus our attention on release from imprisonment, we have the opportunity to reach others with the Good News message of release from imprisonment from sin through faith in Christ.

Our theme for this introductory encounter with Acts – GOD OPENS DOORS! Throughout Acts mission opportunity doors open with frequency. Note who opens the doors! It is God! That's important for us to hear when it comes to doing mission work locally and globally. It is easy for us to focus on what we do and forget whose mission it is and who is the major active agent in expansion of the mission. GOD OPENS DOORS! What an image! What Good News! What optimism that statement gives us for venturing forth today to reach the unchurched and lost in our communities!

OPENING AND APPLYING THE SCRIPTURES

The following passages help us develop the truths that God opens doors, God's heart is in reaching the lost, and God uses us to reach others with the Gospel.

1. Acts 14:27 *On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.*

Acts 13:1-3 records the sending (from church in Antioch) Barnabas and Saul to do mission work among the Gentiles (non-Jews). This passage comes at the conclusion of that journey (called Paul's first missionary journey). Things went well. A major shift had occurred in the outreach of the early church – the Gospel was brought to non-Jews!

- ⇒ Discuss why it is important to communicate with one another about what's happening in mission work?
- ⇒ What does your church do to tell the story of mission outreach and challenges (open doors of faith)?
- ⇒ Develop a list of the open doors (mission opportunities) before you and your congregation to reach people in your community?

2. Acts 5:19-20 *But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life."*

The place – Solomon's Portico in Jerusalem (the temple area where Peter spoke to the crowds after healing the man who was lame from birth; it also became a regular gathering place for Christians). The activity – signs and wonders were performed by the apostles. Believers were added. Many came for healing. However, there was opposition from the high priest and Sadducees.



- ⇒ When it comes to doing mission work in your community what is the opposition? Develop a list of the obstacles.
- ⇒ What comfort and encouragement comes to you from this text to help you in mission outreach?
- ⇒ Discuss the audience of your mission outreach and the message you bring to that audience.

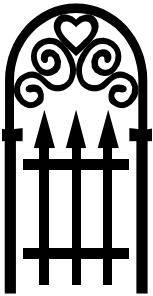
3. Acts 12:10 *They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street,*

suddenly the angel left him.

Acts door miracle number two! Peter is back in jail. Herod the king (Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the great) had James killed (Acts 12:1-2) and Peter arrested. This time Peter was carefully guarded. Yet God intervened and rescued Peter – the iron gate to the city opened. Peter was set free by God to continue his outreach ministry.

- ⇒ Share with one another how God has set you free to be a missionary for Christ.
- ⇒ What are the iron gates to the city God is opening for you and your congregation?

4. Acts 16:25-26 *About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose.*



The third door miracle in Acts! This time it is Paul and Silas. It all happens within the context of Paul's second missionary journey. The town is Philippi, the leading city in the area of northern Greece called Macedonia.

While there, Paul cast out an evil spirit from a slave girl. This caused all kinds of commotion. The people pitted Paul against Rome, which resulted in Paul and Silas being beaten and thrown into prison. Again God intervenes – people are rescued, doors are opened.

- ⇒ Scan the verses after twenty-six. Describe the outreach opportunity presented before Paul and Silas. What did they say and do?
- ⇒ What opportunities are there for you to reach families in your community? What could you do to touch their lives?

5. Rev 3:7-8 *To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.*

The first part of Revelation includes seven letters to seven churches in Asia Minor (present day Turkey).

Philadelphia was strategically located in a fruitful land. It was a wealthy city. Not so the case with the church – it was small and faithful. Nevertheless, the Lord promises them mission opportunity and victory. Size – big or small – is never an excuse for not getting involved in walking through the open door opportunities of mission work.

- ⇒ An open door to missions is set before the church at Philadelphia. How does the description of the risen Christ in this letter bring encouragement and optimism to the challenge?
- ⇒ As you evaluate your outreach activities are you focusing more on your smallness or God's greatness and power?
- ⇒ "Behold, I have set before you an open door" says Jesus. For you, what is it?

6. John 10:7-9 *Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture."*

John's Gospel makes a major shift for us in viewing the open door word-picture. The focus shifts from mission to Messiah! Jesus himself is the door – the door of entrance to the safe sanctuary of the sheep pen. If you are going to be effective in going through the open doors to mission opportunity you need to be in constant contact with Jesus, the Door to salvation and life.

- ⇒ Develop a list of opportunities in your congregation to be in touch with the Door?
- ⇒ Why is it important to be in touch with the Door? How does such contact impact mission outreach?
- ⇒ It is both/and – preparation (connect with the Door) and proclamation (walking through the open doors to share Jesus with others). What are the implications of Jesus being the only door?



7. Rev 3:20 *Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*

A door picture again. A very familiar one at that! Remember - these are words of Jesus spoken to believers. It is not addressing our participation with

Christ in our salvation (that's already happened). Rather, the passage speaks about what happens (the blessings) when Christ abides in us. It is a new life and a new fellowship and a new venture.

Offer up short prayers: thanking God for being the Door; thanking him for partnering with us in mission outreach; asking for courage to focus on reaching the lost; and seeking courage to go through the doors he opens to us.



What pictures do you have of God from looking at the seven passages in this lesson?

Select one thing (open door) God is calling you to do in order to reach the people in your community – your mission field. Pray about it. Develop a plan of action.

**Remember:
GOD OPENS DOORS!**

NOTES: