

CLEAR VISION

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Soul Food: The Door of Opportunity



By Rich Blue

Doors signify times of transition and opportunity.

Doors represent the fear of leaving what is behind and the anticipation of what lies ahead. The Apostle Paul wrote, *“Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”* (Phil 3:13-14) Paul understood the importance of doors. He experienced many challenges in which he chose to leave behind the familiar and move into the unknown trusting in God’s direction and companionship.

One of the first big doors I remember facing was when I was 16 years old and recovering from the sobering realization that football was not my life. I had

I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:9-10)

been a member of the freshmen football team and had played only one play the entire season. The cornerstone of my identity had always been my prowess in football. I was both devastated by my dreadful performance and determined to regain my status as a starting football player. I knew nothing else.

The next season, with determination I regained my starting position on the team. In spite of my accomplishment, I was left with a nagging and profound sense of disillusionment and despair. My eyes were opening to the fact that football was not what I had believed it to be. Up until then, I had never been willing to consider questions of what gave my life meaning and purpose.

It was during this time of existential doubt and despair that I was scanning my internal walls to find new doors. My next steps had always been something related to football. For the first time

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I could remember I was open to something new. A friend invited me to a Young Life meeting. I accepted his invitation when I would have run from it previ-

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ously. I knew virtually nothing about God except the hymn, *Holy, Holy, Holy*, and the Ten Commandments. Doors of opportunity were opening and nothing was the same in my life. I was asking questions instead of spewing answers. Anxiety and the unknown were becoming my new teachers.

Many of us make it our life purpose to avoid trials and temptations, both for ourselves as well as those we love. We inadvertently rob ourselves and others of the opportunities to find doors through which we can escape the matrixes of our mistaken rules and beliefs. We worship the god of the status quo. James writes, *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may*

be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4)

What I discovered by going through the Christ door was the experience of being regarded by God with the utmost respect and being offered unconditional compassion and acceptance. I was experiencing what I didn't even know I was longing for. The pain resulting from my setbacks in football was opening my eyes. The suffering produced a sorrow in me that was preparing me for the possibility of transformation. I could now see doors where previously I had only seen walls.

If you are going through a season of setbacks, look for the doors of opportunity. Have the courage to let go of what you have known and be willing to try doors you may have never seen before.

Ask God for the eyes to see his presence and the ears to hear his voice. Make it a point to pursue instead of avoid your relationship with God. Be honest, share your heart, and seek His guidance. I believe God's desire is that each of us knows we are loved by Him and that we are dedicated to becoming our most whole, complete, and Christ-like selves. Paul's promise for those who are willing to fight the good fight is, *“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it”* (1 Cor 10:13).

When one door closes another door opens; but we often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door, that we do not see the ones which open for us. -Alexander Graham Bell (1847-1922)

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Cost of Hostility

By Andrew Mercer



Just last month, a situation at the office brought into focus just how often my hostility robs me of true connection, intimacy, and trust. One of my duties in our assignment groups is to keep accurate written notes of what transpires. One night I blew off my responsibilities and barely took any notes at all. Much to my surprise, my failure to take good notes was discovered and I received a stiff talking to. I was asked to re-do the notes for the group along with doing an essay on my hostility and lack of integrity. My insights surprised me. I began to see a clearer connection between anger, integrity, and intimacy, and that even while I try hard to maintain a clean image, my hostility leaks out.

I think I come off as cool, calm, and collected, but the trail of wreckage behind me is evidence of how destructive my anger can be. Instead of goodwill, I tend to generate hostility in others by expressing my anger and upset indirectly. I use anger as a justification for staying out of relationship-- if someone makes me mad, then I don't want to be in relationship with them. I avoid expressing anger directly, and fool myself into thinking that I am not angry at all. Yet the toll that unexpressed anger takes on my relationships and myself is costly. I end up creating the reality I hope to avoid-- one in which I live in isolation, loneliness and fear.

Hostility keeps me out of integrity with myself and other people. Each time that I am angry yet choose to express it indirectly I am dishonest with myself. My emotions are the one reliable indicator I have as to how I am doing and how I am experiencing the outside world. When I am out of integrity with myself, I feel scared and ashamed; I live in shame often. I was brought up in a home in which shame was used to

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keep me in line. As long as I allowed shame to control me, I was not in danger of stepping out of line and challenging my parent's authority. I was kept small in my family and I accepted my diminished state for a payoff. I settled for clothes, cars, food, and gifts instead of demanding more of the emotional support and attention I craved.

I am angry, angry that the incompleteness in my notes was caught. I am angry to be called out on it, and I am angry that I do not contribute more meaningfully in group. I am angry that people don't expect more from me, and that my biggest contribution to the group is the notes that I keep. I am angry that I do not fight to take up more space in the room, and I am angry I get away with it. I am angry I was not held to a higher standard when I was younger, and I am angry that I am held to a higher standard now. I am angry that I got away with so much growing up and I am angry that I am not getting away with it now. I am angry that I have to grow up and angry that I have not grown up yet.

Living with integrity means that my anger is to be respected. I use my anger as motivation to change and build relationships instead of a justification to stay out of it. I can no longer blame others for my under-performance, because when I own my anger and express it responsibly, I live in integrity. Trusting myself more fully allows me to extend trust to other people as well. I no longer need the hostility I have clung to to keep me safe. I am able to trust that as I have and own my reactions, I can take care of myself and remain safe as an adult without resorting to child-like tactics to get my way.

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