

## CLINGING TO HOPE

## STUDY TEN

## When Doors Slam Shut

*Acts 16:6–10*

*We like open doors. We like green lights. We like wide open entrances into great opportunities. Detours and dead-end streets are never enjoyable, certainly not at the time. But sometimes they are divine gifts from the One who loves us.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

A slammed door makes a harsh sound, doesn't it? It's harsh to the ears and the heart. It rings of rejection, refusal, and exclusion. It's absolute, like the exclamation point on a sign that says, "No Entrance!" or "Keep Out!"

A blocked opportunity can seem like a slammed door. After much prayer and wise counsel, you expectantly set out for a particular goal that you feel certain is God's will. The road is smooth and the timing seems right, then, without warning—*slam*. Your ministry dream never materializes. The relationship you hoped might lead to marriage ends in a breakup. The house you had your heart set on is sold to another family. The contract you worked months to win is awarded to another firm. You may ask yourself, "Why did things not turn out as planned? What did I do wrong?"

Perhaps it's not a matter of doing wrong. Although the closed door feels like a rebuff, it may be an unexpected blessing. Behind that closed door may be a hand of grace.



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### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Unfulfilled dreams can feel devastating. As you seek God's counsel, invite your Father's tender touch.

*Father, You know how much of myself I invested in a dream that turned out to be a dead end. Through the lens of Your Word, open my eyes to Your perspective on closed doors and refocus my hope on You. In Jesus' name, amen.*



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Paul ran into a series of closed doors on his second missionary journey . . . which must have surprised him. He had every reason to expect the second journey to be just as successful as the first. He had taken the gospel to Jews in Cyprus and cities west of his hometown, Tarsus, and, amazingly, God “had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles, too” (Acts 14:27). Surely, God would hold this door of faith open on Paul's second trip as well.

The Jerusalem council had given their blessing to him to minister to Gentiles (15:6–29). Paul had joined with a new traveling partner, Silas, and the Antioch church had given their full support, entrusting them “to the Lord's gracious care” (15:40). All these factors flowed together like tributaries, forming a bubbling river of excitement for the journey ahead.



### Observation: Closed Doors, Open Doors

Observation is the first step to deeper understanding and, most importantly, application. Use your observation skills to answer the following questions, expanding your answers if you see anything else interesting in the verses.

According to [Acts 15:36](#), what reason did Paul give for taking a second journey? Why did Barnabas decide not to accompany Paul this time, according to [15:37–40](#)?



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### *Searching the Scriptures Bible Maps*

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method, a handy tool in the observation process is a Bible atlas. We recommend *Zondervan Essential Atlas of the Bible* by Carl G. Rasmussen, which you can purchase at [insight.org](http://insight.org). This resource contains an excellent set of maps of Paul's missionary journeys. You can also find Paul's journeys in the maps section of your Bible or the online map, "*Paul's Missionary Journeys*."

### Open Doors in Familiar Territory

Looking on your Bible map of Paul's missionary journeys, trace Paul and Silas' trip from its beginning point through the first leg in *Acts 15:40–41*? What was their initial objective?

As the missionaries pushed west, they visited churches Paul had planted. Whom did Paul select to join him in Lystra, and what attributes made him particularly helpful to Paul's plan to reach Jews and Gentiles, according to *16:1–3*?



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What Mark lacked as Paul's apprentice on his first journey, Paul found in Timothy. Timothy was familiar with this region, plus, Timothy had staying power. For years, he clung to Paul—his spiritual father and mentor—and, later, became one of the early church's first pastors (*1 Timothy 1:1–2; 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:1–6*).

Paul delighted in Timothy and was pleased with the health of the churches. How did the doors keep opening in *Acts 16:4–5*? All signs pointed up and onward!

*Good news! The churches grew larger every day. How exciting for Paul when he returned to see the Lord using his earlier work. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

### Closed Doors in the New Territory

With a favorable breeze of success at their backs, the band of missionaries traveled westward. On your map, trace the regions recorded in *Acts 16:6–8*. What happened again and again, however, as they tried to gain a foothold for the gospel in these areas?



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In one region, the Holy Spirit “prevented them from preaching the word” and “did not allow them to go there” in another (Acts 16:6–7). Other Bible versions described the Spirit’s actions with equally strong words—“forbidden” (NASB), “blocked” (MSG), and “the Spirit of Jesus said no” (LB). The Spirit closed each door with a slam until they arrived at Troas, and there they stopped and wondered what to do next.

What do you observe about the location of Troas on your map? What must the missionaries have felt as they arrived at this distant city after so many closed doors along the way?

*No explanation. God somehow prevented them from entering these areas of spiritual darkness. It must have been tough for Paul, but we read no argument from him or see him attempting to force his way through. He simply accepted God’s closed doors.*  
—Pastor Church Swindoll

### Open Door across the Sea

What happened in Troas, according to [Acts 16:9–10](#)? What change do you notice in the personal pronoun in 16:10? What does this change in the telling of the narrative imply? Who joined the group? If you’re stumped, check your study Bible to identify the person, who is also the author of Acts.



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The abilities of the missionaries were never in doubt, nor was their calling. The people of Asia needed Christ just as much as the people in Europe, and yet, God specifically said no to Asia and yes to Europe. Why? The issue was whose hearts were ready to receive the gospel, and only the Holy Spirit knew where the soil was most fertile for planting.

Understanding how God closes doors and opens others is our next subject.



### Interpretation: God's Will in Closed Doors

In the interpretation phase, we seek to discover the meaning of the passage, which in this case involves how God communicates His will . . . which is mysterious at times. How exactly did the Holy Spirit prevent, forbid, not allow, block, or say no?

Read about [Acts 16:6–8](#) in your Bible study resources, including commentaries. Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Acts* is a helpful resource. Online, consult [Constable's Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#) or [The IVP New Testament Commentary Series](#) at [biblegateway.com](#). Write down what you find.

Whatever means the Spirit used, His closed doors were clearly evident, and the missionaries obeyed God without question. Just as clear was Paul's vision of a man from northern Greece calling out, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" (16:9). There was no doubt about the source of this vision or the message.



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What principle can you conclude about God leading us with closed and open doors based on Paul's experience?

*Sometimes God keeps us in a holding pattern for months. We think, "I need a vision!" Since we have the complete Bible, all we need is the Word of God, a bended knee, and a willingness to wait for clear direction. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Correlation: God Opens and Closes Doors

Where else in Scripture do we find teaching about God opening and closing doors? Read [Revelation 3:7–8](#). What do these verses say about the nature and authority of Jesus, who is the subject?

We usually think of God as a door opener, don't we? But through the Spirit and through Jesus, God closes doors just as often. What confidence does this verse give you in trusting God's hand of guidance?



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### **Application: Trusting God to Open and Close Doors**

Through the following application principles, Pastor Chuck Swindoll draws our focus to God when doors slam shut.

- 1) *Because God is sovereign, He is in full control of all the doors in our lives.*
- 2) *Being in full control, God takes full responsibility.*
- 3) *When a door of something good according to our plan closes, it often leads us to an open door of something better in God's plan.*
- 4) *Not until we walk through the door that God opens will we realize the necessity of the ones He closed.*

How do you handle closed doors? Do you jiggle the knob? Pound on the door? Try to shoulder it open? What feelings do you experience—disappointment, frustration, rejection, anger, confusion, fear?

How can Paul's example and the principles above help you the next time a door closes?





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After a series of closed doors, could God be opening a door you didn't expect? How might you alter your course to enter?

Stopping the journey because of a disappointing no may cause you to miss the joy of a future yes. Keep moving forward like Paul and his companions until you reach the open door . . . and don't be afraid to walk through it, trusting God to lead you in His plan.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, thank You for closing doors and helping me move away from what I thought was Your direction to Your true path. Give me a sensitive heart, an open mind, and a willingness to follow You wherever You lead. In Jesus' name, amen.*

