

THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S WILL

STUDY TEN

Closed Doors, Open Doors

Acts 16:5–15; Revelation 3:7–9

When a door closes, it is easy to be disillusioned and discouraged. We think we have missed God's will. In fact, we are very likely in the nucleus of His will.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

A CLOSED door is one of the most baffling mysteries of God's will. The university you thought God was leading you to rejects your application. The relationship you hoped would grow deeper ends abruptly. The house that seemed like God's plan for your family sold to someone else. The contract you worked months to win is given to another firm.

Pastor Chuck Swindoll has faced closed doors in his life and ministry when he was certain that he was following God's will. Wide-open opportunities suddenly slammed shut, and he was left to wonder why. In his book, *The Mystery of God's Will*, he describes the experience.

A slammed door is a harsh sound. It's not an easy sound to listen to. And it's an even harder thing to experience, especially if you have genuinely sought God's will. . . .

I'm not saying it closed because you were living in sin or because your heart was turned against what God wanted or because you were selfish in some way. It just closed. Nobody can explain why. And you sort of reel and step back. You talk to the Lord and it's as though the heavens are brass. The door has closed. Period. End of story. Or is it?¹

Closed doors aren't necessarily dead ends. They may lead to unexpected opportunities you never thought possible just around the corner. In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we'll discover the blessings closed doors can open up when we follow God's will.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you prepare your heart to engage His Word today, join the psalmist David in reflecting on God’s ultimate goodness toward the righteous, and offer this prayer to God from Psalm 34:15, 18–19.

*The eyes of the LORD watch over those who do right;
his ears are open to their cries for help. . . .
The LORD is close to the brokenhearted;
he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.
The righteous person faces many troubles,
but the LORD comes to the rescue each time.*



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

On his second missionary journey, Paul ran into a series of closed doors which must have surprised him. He had every reason to expect the second journey to be just as successful as the first.

In his first journey, he proclaimed the gospel to the Jews in Cyprus and cities west of his hometown. Amazingly, God “opened the door of faith to the Gentiles, too” (Acts 14:27). Surely, God would swing open this door even wider on Paul’s second trip.

The Jerusalem council had given the green light to continue ministering to Gentiles (15:6–29). Paul had joined with a new traveling partner, Silas, and the Antioch church had given its 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.



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Observation and Interpretation: Paul's Closed Doors



In the following charts, combine observation and interpretation by first reading the passage under the heading and then summarizing the action in the left column. Next, in the right column, write down the meaning of the passage.²

God Said . . . Return and Strengthen <i>Acts 15:40–16:5</i>	
During his first missionary journey, Paul and his companions had established multiple churches. Then, they launched into their second missionary journey.	
 Observation	 Interpretation
Read <i>Acts 15:40–16:5</i> . What do you observe?	Why did Paul and his team return to those churches, and why is this significant for believers today?
How did Paul's journey begin?	Why was <i>Timothy</i> circumcised?



Their hearts are right, they're veteran missionaries, they desire to make Christ known, there is no selfish motive, they have been launched by a good church in Antioch, they've already had one missionary journey and it was successful.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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God Said . . . Not There <i>Acts 16:6–8</i>	
As Paul and his companions traveled on their second missionary journey they were forbidden to proclaim the Word in certain regions.	
 Observation	 Interpretation
Review a map of “ <i>Paul’s Missionary Journeys.</i> ” What happened in <i>Acts 16:6–8</i> ?	What is significant about the unusual phrase, “Spirit of Jesus” (16:7)?

Paul must have thought, Lord, what is this about? He and Silas must have sought the Lord many hours, asking God, “What are You trying to do? What are You trying to tell us?” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

God Said . . . Go Here <i>Acts 16:9–15</i>	
Following the Lord’s vision and direction, Paul and his companions traveled to Macedonia to proclaim the Word and to continue planting churches throughout Europe.	
 Observation	 Interpretation
Observe <i>Acts 16:9–15</i> . How did Paul receive God’s will?	How do believers discern God’s will today, and how does that contrast with Paul’s experience?

As a result of obeying God—doing His will, accepting the closed doors, and walking through the open ones—God will honor you with a perspective you would never otherwise have. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Correlation: God Opens and Closes Doors

The book of Revelation, written by the apostle John, contains the Lord's message to seven first-century churches. One of those churches, the church in Philadelphia, was less influential in the region, but it was a faithful church. Read [Revelation 3:7–9](#). What two observations do you note about Jesus?

What key phrases are repeated, and what does it indicate?

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 does this truth say about the closed doors you've faced?

God is the potter; we are the clay. He is the one who gives the commands; we are the ones who obey. . . . He is shaping us into the image of His Son.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Trusting God to Open and Close Doors

Has the Lord Jesus recently closed a door in your life? Even if it doesn't make sense, what action steps can you take to move forward with what He has next for you?

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When doors shut, keep in mind the following four principles from our study:

- 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 see these principles at work in your life?

Is the Lord opening for you a door of opportunity? In faith, what action steps will you take to walk through that door?

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? Be honest about these feelings to the Lord, but don't stop looking for God's will. Ending 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.

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A FINAL PRAYER

Close your study by making Pastor Chuck's prayer your own.

Father, soften the soil of our heart that's hardened by bitterness or sadness or resentment or blame—that You'd find within us a spirit of willingness and availability. Thank You for the magnificent model that Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke exemplify in the Scriptures. Show us how to quietly back away and let it be. May Your Spirit bring great comfort amid our human disappointment and disillusionment. In Christ's name we ask this. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *The Mystery of God's Will* (Nashville: Word, 1999), 185.
2. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Marshall F. Davis in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1999, 2025 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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