

DIVINE DOORWAYS

Entering the Sacred Opportunities of Daily Life

Texts: Colossians 4:2-6

Look Forward to Game Time

If you happen to have the TV tuned in to the station that most Americans will be watching this afternoon, you are going to see a bunch of very big people burst out of a tunnel and onto a football field. Imagine that you were crazy enough to throw your body in front of that stampede. Imagine that you have a microphone in your hand and you push it into the face of one of those players. You ask, all excited: "So, how was your time in the locker room?!" What do suppose the response would be?

I'm guessing that if the player didn't knock the mic away and run you over, you'd likely meet a look of confusion. Why? Because the last thing on his mind at that moment would be how it went on the training table, or what he lifted in the weight room, or how he felt when he was putting on his shoulder pads. There is going to be one focus as bursts out on that field: "It is GAME time!"

That's how it's meant to be in the Christian life too. As important as what we do here in this beautiful locker room is, it is mainly preparation for the most important part of our discipleship. Attending worship and doing Bible study and engaging in all the good activities that happen when you enter a church building are fabulous works, but they aren't Christianity. They are preparation FOR the great goal of living for the glory of God and for the sake of others out there on that field.

That's what this series of messages has been all about. We've been thinking about game time. My teammates have been helping us reflect on how we are meant to handle ourselves out there around the various tables, or with the screens and media that fill our everyday life. Today, I want to close out the series by helping us think about how we behave at what I'm calling the DIVINE DOORWAYS of our daily journey.

Recognize that Life is Full of Sacred Thresholds

Maybe you've noticed that the Bible talks a lot about doors. If you read the Old Testament closely, you see that it gives great attention to describing the doorway of the Ark, and the doorway of the Temple, and the gates and doorways to the Holy City of Jerusalem. At one point, the Psalmist says: "**I would rather be a DOORkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked**" (Psa 84:10). In the Gospels, Jesus tells us that his disciples are to be as watchful for what God will next do as servants who stand at the door, looking for the return of their master (Mark 13:34). In the Book of

Revelation, Jesus says that he stands at the door of human lives, eager to take action. (Rev 3:20).

From a biblical viewpoint, doorways are sacred thresholds. They are not merely architectural structures we blithely blitz through. Gates and doorways have a spiritual symbolism and significance to them. They are places where we are meant to pause and take stock of who we are, where we are, where we are going, and with which orientation we should move forward. Doors are what Barbara Brown Taylor calls "altars in the world," spots that invite us into a deeper awareness of God, others, and self.

One of the most famous pictures of this idea is found in Deuteronomy 6: **"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children"** (Deut 6:4-7). And then Moses goes on to say: **"Write them on the DOORframes of your houses and on your gates"** (Deut 4:9).

Why would it be helpful to write the words of God's commandments on your door? Because in seeing and reading God's word, you might just pass across that threshold differently. You might enter into that next space on your journey influenced God's vision and values, instead of living out of your anxieties, angers, compulsivity, or unconscious soundtrack. That's what I want to invite you to do this week. Pause and reflect when you find yourself at any one of the following THREE DOORS.

At the Door of the Locker Room

The FIRST one, I named for you a little earlier. It's what I call the LOCKER ROOM DOOR. It's the threshold between any place where you've been doing training for or talking about the game plan of the Christian life and where you actually will or will not live that out on the field. For you, it might be the glass doors you'll push open on your way out of this building today. It might be the door of your house, as you leave to go to work following a morning quiet time.

For me, the Locker Room Door is hung at the exit of the Corner Bakery Coffee Shop in Hinsdale. Every Friday, I meet with a group of guys there. We study a Christian curriculum together. We encourage and laugh with one another. I always get up from that circle of fellowship with a greater measure of peace in my spirit, with a greater clarity about how I can express my love of God by the faith and hope and love I exercise in the other arenas of my life. And then I walk out through the locker room door. And the hits start coming.

A freight train is crossing the track at a snail's pace and I see I'm going to be late for my next appointment and it's like I'm surprised and outraged. I feel my

blood pressure rising and the peace that I was feeling one minute ago evaporating. I glance at my phone and see that I've got texts and emails already streaming in from people who are expecting me to do stuff, a lot of stuff. I need to finish up the sermon and catch up on the stuff I didn't get done earlier in the week, and there's so much to be done on Saturday. I feel the muscles in my neck and shoulders tense up and I know this is going to be a bad day. Within the next few hours, I will feel pummeled like a high school halfback up against an NFL team. I will grow discouraged and doubtful and more than a little depressed. It will affect my health and my relationships and I will be losing yardage to the Enemy's team.

But what if I could stop at the door of the Locker Room and do what the Apostle Paul recommends in his letter to the Colossians: **"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful"** (Col 4:2). Suppose I got to the door, stood aside so that others could pass, and bowed my head for a moment: "God, I expect the conditions out there on the field will be hard. Life's challenging to begin with and there's an Opponent who would love me to get all self-pitying and frustrated and completely off my game. So here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to be watchful. I'm going to be waiting for when the hits come and when they do, I'm going to remind myself that this IS what I have been training for. When I feel the impact of those hits, I'm going to be thankful that I get the opportunity to practice my faith. I'm going to be thankful that there is nothing I'm going to face that you can't help me through. **"I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength"** (Phil 4:13). What if every time you and I touched the handle of any door, we just repeated that promise together? Could it make a difference in the everyday comings and goings?

At the Door of Your Workplace or Home

When I was thirty-one, I became the pastor of a church near San Diego. I jumped into that job with great gusto and was pleased to see the church grow in many measures within just a few years. One day I came into the office after a spate of appointments elsewhere and noticed that there was a terrible tension in the air. I had felt this tension building in the past weeks and figured that there must be some catty in-fighting going on between some of the staff. Or maybe some members of the congregation were just getting too demanding or difficult and had upset my teammates. It was clear to me that I needed to seize the opportunity to address what was obviously a hidden problem.

So asked my assistant, Roxie: "What's going on? People seem to be on edge around here. Who do I need to confront about whatever's happening to fix this?" "You really want to know?" said Roxie. "YES!" I said. "It's you, Dan. The problem is you. You come flying in here like a holy tornado, expecting everybody to move at your pace. But we can't. We're just human beings." I was speechless. But there was an awful ring of truth to everything Roxie said.

Driven by my sanctified ambition and immature will, I was treating my co-workers, my family members too, as if they were extensions of myself. They were like prosthetics that could extend my grasp and influence. But this was terribly wrong. These people were outside of me, precious souls toward whom I needed to exercise a lot more love and wisdom.

The Apostle Paul wrote: **"Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders"** (Col 4:5). Paul was talking about non-believers, but the call to wisdom is just the same. In the following weeks I trained myself to stop at the door of my workplace. Before going in I would stop, take a deep breathe and pray: "God, slow my tornado. Help me love the people I'm going to encounter inside for WHO they ARE and not for what they can DO for ME." To this day I still pray that prayer some mornings when I get to the door of my workplace, with my agenda already racing. I pray it sometimes before turning the door knob to go into my house at night.

What are the places you'll go to this week where you might be inclined to bring your own compulsions, ambitions, and anxieties in a way that would exhaust or injure others? When you get to that door, what if you took a deep breath and prayed: "Lord, I lay all that is whirling in me on the altar of this threshold. Slow me down and give me wisdom as enter this space." Could that make a difference in your life or that of others?

At the Door of Opportunity

God wants to meet us at the doorways of life and be our vision and strength as we move through. So look to him at the Locker Room Door, at the Door of Your Workplace or Home and, finally, at the Door of Opportunity. **"Pray that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ... Pray that I may proclaim it clearly... Make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt"** (Col 4:3-6).

Every single week, most of us find ourselves at some door not made of wood, or glass, or steel, but of the mysterious stuff of holy potential. What I mean is that we're in some interaction with others that God could use to bring about some needed transformation, if we just had the courage to step out, turn the handle, and push.

Paul Borthwick tells the story of challenging young executives at a church in New York City to consider how they might use their professional positions to advance God's kingdom. After the service, a man approached Paul and said, in effect: "I work for a clothing company with a factory in Madagascar. I buy jeans from that factory for \$1 and sell them on Fifth Avenue for \$400. I don't think the conditions in that factory and with those workers are very good. Maybe there's an opportunity here." (Matt 25:40)

And so the young exec opened the door. He contacted the factory in Madagascar. "How much would it cost if the factory started paying for the school fees of the workers' children, and helped them with afford better housing, and offered some health care, improved sanitation, and more reasonable working hours?" Some time went by and then a message came back from the factory management. "I'm sorry, but such added benefits would quadruple the price for the jeans to four dollars a pair." OK, said they buyer, eying the \$400 retail tag. "I think we can authorize that."

I wonder where you'll be this week, when the door presents itself to turn the conversation toward the vision or values of God's kingdom. You'll realize, if I just named with grace, seasoned by a bit of salt, the brutal fact nobody wants to face, it could change things for the better here. If I posed this probing question to this person I think is avoiding the truth or has lost the way... If I dared to express this vulnerable desire I have for our relationship... If I dared to ask for the order in this circumstance or took a leap of faith toward this new adventure... God and his kingdom might fill this space. What is stopping you from turning that handle and giving it a push?

Because, everyday, these Divine Doorways are there in front of us: The Door of the Locker Room as we head out onto the field where faith matters. The Door of our Workplace or Home where how we treat people truly counts. And the Door of Opportunity where the blessings of God in the lives of others await our courage to simply step through. When we come to those thresholds, what will we do?

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