

“The Screen Door Generation”

John 10:1-10

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor
Smoke Rise Baptist Church
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I am a part of the screen door generation. I grew up in a time when houses had screen doors that let light, air, pollen and noise filter throughout each room. Company never surprised us because we could hear their car coming up the gravel driveway. Spring rains did not sneak up on us either because we could smell them before they arrived. I like screen doors and the memories they rekindle.

The early development of skyscrapers presented a big problem to engineers. Interior drafts made it difficult to open and shut traditional doors. Without an easier way to go in and out, the future of tall buildings was in jeopardy. How was this problem solved? The next time you pass through a revolving door, remember this story and smile.

Until the middle of the Twentieth Century, the front doors of banks were big, thick, solid and impenetrable. They gave the impression that the money deposited inside was secure but the owners of that money did not need to come often to check on it. When customers began complaining about the uninviting and intimidating entrance to the bank, the doors were changed to glass that looked more “user friendly” and allowed customers to see people transacting business in a casual atmosphere.

Doors have always been important for the message they communicate as well as the function they serve. This was especially true in biblical times. Sheep were easy prey for thieves that wanted to steal them or wild animals that wanted to devour them. Many times their only line of defense was a door that stood between them and those that would harm them.

Jesus was aware of the significance of doors in their culture and knew there were times when the shepherd would actually become the door through which the sheep would go in and out. In the evening on a hillside, the shepherd would corral his flock in a cove enclosed by a wall and position himself at the entrance, between the sheep and those that would harm them.

I think this was why Jesus used a simple yet powerful metaphor to reveal his identity and his listeners’ need. Explaining the meaning of a parable about the vulnerability of sheep, he boldly claimed, “I am the door. Whoever enters by me will be saved. He will come in and go out and find pasture” John 10:9.

John used many images to describe Jesus: light, bread, water and a vine are a few of them. The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd that has the best interest of his sheep in mind is a prominent theme in this gospel. Why did John include the metaphor of Jesus as a door, though? What message was John sending to his readers, including us?

What is the purpose of a door? It allows people to come and go from an enclosed area. Without a door, even a nice place becomes a prison.

In his writings, the French philosopher John Paul Sartre described an ornate banquet room filled with beautiful people and a table laden with food and drink. Instead of it being a festive occasion filled with joy and laughter, though, the people were sad and forlorn. There was no life or energy in the room. Why? A closer examination revealed that there were no windows and doors, no exits. These people were hopelessly trapped in this room forever.

Is there any feeling worse than being trapped? How many people feel this way today? I know too many and it grieves me.

There are times in our lives when we need to leave where we are because it is not in our best interest to stay there. On the other hand, we need to go somewhere else because it is to our advantage. Often we cannot make that decision or journey by ourselves and need others to lead and guide us. Jesus is willing to help us and will send others to assist us, too.

In 1977, Jackie and I along with several friends attended a concert at the Beverly Hills Supper Club outside of Cincinnati. Our experience there was enjoyable and pleasant. One month later, that club caught on fire during a concert. One hundred sixty-five people perished in the flames. It is the seventh deadliest public assembly fire in U.S. history.

Why did so many people die? There were two reasons. The exits were poorly marked in a building whose interior was built like a maze with narrow hallways and stairwells. In addition, several exit doors were locked and barred, rendering them useless. Bodies were literally stacked on top of one another in front of immovable doors.

Studies of this disaster led to sweeping reforms of safety codes. Investigators provided lawmakers with the information they needed to strengthen existing codes to minimize the risk of this happening again. They wanted to do all they could to see that no one would perish in a burning building because they could not find an operable exit. I wish the same could be said about people that are trapped in hopeless situations.

Our world is filled with people that are in harm's way and have no idea how to escape. They cannot find the door or open it if they do. This may describe where you are in your life.

You may be in a dangerous and unhealthy place. Perhaps you wandered in unsuspectingly like vulnerable sheep or were led astray by someone you trusted. You might have deliberately chosen to be where you are but realize now that this was a bad decision. You want to leave and need to do so, but do not know how to make this happen. As a result, you feel trapped and are frightened, confused and depressed. What do you do?

Begin by acknowledging your need and asking Jesus for help. Ask him to give you a vision of a new and better life. Turn to him for the wisdom, courage and confidence you need to get out of a bad situation. Ask him to open "doors of opportunity" that will make your exit possible and request the ability to trust the people that he will send your way to help you.

This may not describe where you are this morning but you know someone it does. It could be a family member or friend and what they need is someone that will escort them out of that dangerous place. Be the presence of Christ in their life and walk with them. Show them the way out of a hopeless situation.

I spent a portion of last week encouraging a mother of a twenty-five-year-old alcoholic to be the presence of Christ in his life. Two weeks ago, she took the initiative to confront him with his addiction. She led three other family members into his bedroom early one morning in what professionals call an "Intervention." They shared with him their observations and a plan of action for recovery. This journey of hope led them to a facility in Atlanta. She was here this week to receive family counseling and let him know that she was still on that journey with him.

Is this process painful for her? Is it costly? Is it risky? Of course. Is success guaranteed? No. Why is she doing it? She is unwilling to let her son self-destruct and miss the opportunity for a new and better life, what Jesus called abundant life.

Where did she get the wisdom, confidence and courage to do this? She told me. Sunday after Sunday she would go to church and plead with God to save her son. One day she asked God to show her what she needed to do to make that happen. He told her to be the door through which her son could leave his self-imposed prison and find a new life filled with potential, freedom and hope.

"I am the door," Jesus said. "Whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out and find pasture."

Who do you know that is trapped in a room of hopeless despair with no way out? What difference could you make if you entered their confining world with words of encouragement, hope and guidance? I think you could make a big difference if you ask Jesus to go with you to find and help them. I pray you will and will pray for you as you go.