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Think of the times you've found yourself in a transition. Maybe moving from one house to another, ending one job and starting a new one, adding a new member to your family, or entering into retirement. In a transition, how often do you know what's coming up ahead? How often do you find surprises along the way? When planning a transition, have you ever found that it doesn't go the way you expected?

Five and a half years ago I was in transition, moving from one community to another, searching for a church to serve. I interviewed with a few churches, and one offered me an invitation. I quickly began making plans to settle into the community—looked for a house, placed an offer on it, contacted a bank to secure a loan, and announced to my family that I would be moving to central Indiana.

And then I received a phone call from the chair of the search committee, "I'm not sure how to tell you this, but we've changed our mind. A member of our search committee wasn't present for the interview and would like to review all the

information before we make a final decision." I replied that they had already offered the job to me, and that it was unethical to undo the offer. The chairperson replied, "Well, you can check back with us in a few weeks after we've thought about it a bit more." I politely said I was no longer interested.

A door had closed. And then I heard a voice inviting me to come to Northern Indiana, the chair of your (CCC's) search committee, and here I am. Without that first church changing its mind, I would not be here today.

Even though at the time it often feels frustrating to encounter closed doors, sometimes facing one can be a good thing. I imagine Paul also had mixed feelings when his travel plans changed as he encountered a closed door, for as they were traveling through Asia, Paul tried to enter the province of Bithynia, which was located in what we now call Turkey. The location was situated along a major travel route, so it made sense for Paul to plan to travel there, but some situation prevented them from entering.

The narrator of Acts suggested that the Spirit of Jesus prevented them from entering. I imagine Paul feeling frustrated that this great opportunity he envisioned was blocked, but that evening he had a dreamlike vision of a man from Macedonia calling to him, "Come to our community and help us!" This event prompted Paul to begin his third major journey to tell about his experiences of Jesus, traveling well beyond his first two adventures.

When they arrived in the city of Phillipi, they went down to the river on the Sabbath to find a place for prayer. There they discovered a group of women gathered with Lydia. Although she was a woman of faith, she was a Gentile, an outsider, but that didn't prevent Paul from telling her about Jesus. Once she heard of his experiences, she and her entire household were baptized. She then invited Paul to stay with her family.

Lydia sold purple cloth, which indicates she had substantial financial resources, for obtaining purple dye was quite involved and expensive since the color came from collecting certain snails and grinding them to extract their purple juices. Usually

this color was reserved for royalty, for only the wealthy could afford to purchase this color of cloth.

From this encounter, a church formed in this community, with the likelihood that Lydia was an early leader and major financial supporter of the congregation.<sup>1</sup> If Paul had not encountered the closed door of his original journey, this community of faith may have never originated. He would not have later written his letter to the Philippians while sitting in jail, which means we would not have these wonderful words:

- Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. (4:4)
- Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (4:6)
- I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (4:13)

Imagine if Paul had not encountered a closed door, had never entered this community, had not started a church, and had not written these words

of hope to that church. Even though encountering a closed door can feel frustrating, it can lead to wonderful opportunities. Closed doors do not mean that God has stopped loving you, has abandoned you, or doesn't care where you go. It just means that God envisions something even better.

How many of you have tried to enter a closed door? It seems to be a common experience, as one Muslim writer noted. As I read his reflection, keep in mind that the word *Allah* is the Arabic translation of the word *God*, the same God we worship.

Sometimes it feels as though life is a long corridor full of locked doors. You knock on each door, only to find that your entry is barred, no matter how many times you try to pass through.

You are not alone in feeling this way. Opportunities present themselves to us, in the form of marriage proposals, job offers and leadership positions, and then slip through our fingers by no fault of our own. I've been there.

It's hard to accept Allah's decision over our own sometimes, especially when it's something we want very badly...

Closed doors are my biggest trial in life...

Sometimes, on quiet reflective nights, I ask myself: Is it easy to acknowledge that each missed opportunity was a blessing in disguise? No. Is it easy to look to the future instead of staying stagnated in the past and reminders of what could have been? No. Is it easier to give it all up and entrust all of my affairs to the One who loves me best? Always.<sup>2</sup>

The next time you try to open a door that remains closed, remember that God provides another opportunity, though sometimes you may have to wait to discover the next opening. As you wait, anticipate that God is already providing a new opportunity. Look for an open door, or an open window, where God's Spirit blows through, guiding you in new directions.

<sup>1</sup> See [www.regent.edu/journal/journal-of-biblical-perspectives-in-leadership/lydia-in-the-bible/](http://www.regent.edu/journal/journal-of-biblical-perspectives-in-leadership/lydia-in-the-bible/)

<sup>2</sup> When encountering closed doors, 11-17-17, <https://hadithoftheday.com/when-encountering-closed-doors/>