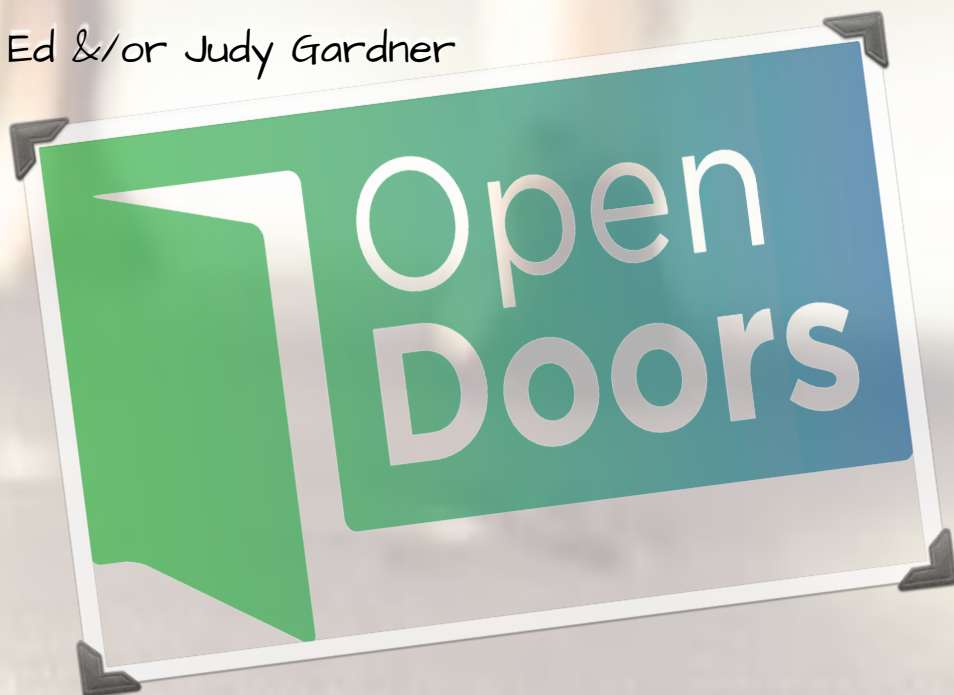


August 18-22, 2025 Edition

Following  
The Year<sup>(s)</sup> Of Jesus Part 189  
Jesus, Big Dreams & Open Doors

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner



August 16/17, 2025

When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

\*\*\* These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

\*\*\*\* Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside](http://www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside)). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

**Monday Reflection:** This week we're going to spend some time talking about something I've been giving a lot of thought to lately- open doors. We talked last week about the importance of having a great dream that you dream in conjunction with God. But what if we don't have anything specific in mind? What do we pray for if we don't have a clear idea of what we'd like to see God do in our lives? I'm glad you asked that question because that's what we're focusing in on this week. First off it's important to recognize that we don't have all the time in the world:

*Teach us to number our days and recognize how few they are; help us to spend them as we should. Psalm 90:12 (TLB)*

This life can seem so long and the future can seem so far off that we often make the mistake of believing we have lots of time. But we don't know for sure how much time we have left. That's something that's out of our control. I can remember my grandma and my great aunts and uncles telling me that I'd be old like they were before I knew it. I thought they were nuts. I mean how long should it take to reach a million years old (which is how old they seemed to me at the time)? But now that I'm 60 years old (still a far cry from a million years old but still) I recognize all too often that I've got many more years behind me than I probably have in front of me in this life. I'm starting to see all too clearly just how fleeting this life is:

*How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog-it's here a little while, then it's gone. James 4:14 (NLT)*

So it's important to me to make the most of the time I have left in this world. Over the last 8 years or so I've had more uncertainty in my life than the entire 52 years before that (I make no claims about the accuracy of those numbers but it sure feels like I'm not exaggerating). Before August 13, 2017 my life was fairly stable and easy. I'm not saying I didn't have problems but for the most part I seemed to live a charmed life. But for the last 8 years that's changed. I still firmly believe I live a charmed life but it doesn't feel as charmed as it used to (if that makes any sense at all). I guess what I'm saying is prior to 2017 I had lots of BIG DREAMS. But since then my life has been much more about survival than figuring out how to dream big dreams.

It felt like it was a pretty big dream to just survive each successive day and the idea of dreaming a big dream for God seemed out of reach. But since I'm starting to recover from all the health issues I struggled with over the last year I realized that I've been basically in a holding pattern for 8 years. And I'm tired of living life in a holding pattern. How about you?

When I gave that lesson on Jabez last weekend I was reminded of the big dreams I dreamed before Riverside was born. I was reminded of how powerfully God worked in my life to bring about the dreams that I believe He gave me. And it made me kind of sad to realize that for 8 years I've been in survival mode rather than creative mode. So this week I started thinking about what kinds of dreams God might want me to dream with Him at this stage of my life. Judy and I are both doing this as a matter of fact. And as I sat blankly staring at my computer screen as I sat down to brainstorm with God what He might have in store for us I remembered another lesson I did years ago about open doors and I decided that this week that's what I'd focus in on. So if you are interested in moving forward in your life with God,

knowing that you have no idea how much time you might have left on this earth nor what kind of quality of life you might have then join me in asking God to open doors for us as we attempt to live the lives He's created us to live.

**Tuesday Reflection:** I talked yesterday about how the last few years have been mostly about survival and just getting through- much more so than the first 52 years of my life were. I had kind of convinced myself that survival and getting by was the best I could hope for while navigating the swirling rapids that had become my life. And for the last year I started wondering if I had much of a future left? There were a few times in the last year that I wondered if I'd ever get any better. But I'm feeling better now and God is telling me that He's not done with me just yet so I should probably get my spurs back off the hook where I had hung them and get ready for the next big dream. I'm not sure what that big dream is yet but that's a big part of why I'm focusing on open doors this week- more on that later in the week.

One thing I'm noticing as I prepare for this lesson is that Paul had it much worse than I do. If you've never read the story of his life maybe you should do that- that poor guy was all over the map with his health and persecutions. In fact Paul ended up in a prison in Rome at the end of his life as he waited for Nero to sign his death order. So what do you think Paul did with his time in prison? Maybe he figured his time was done and he just needed to sit and wait for the order from Nero because there was no sense dreaming any more big dreams? Is that what happened? Nope. Paul continued to ask for prayers but not for comfort or for Nero to die (which would have probably been high on my list of requests). No this is what Paul asked the church in Colossae to pray for:

*Pray for us, that God will open doors for telling the mystery of Christ, even while I'm locked up in this jail. Pray that every time I open my mouth I'll be able to make Christ plain as day to them. Colossians 4:3 (MES)*

Paul never stopped dreaming big dreams for and with God. Heck he wrote about half of the New Testament while he was sitting in prison. And he continued to have an impact on the world around him- and even though the numbers of people he had contact with was severely restricted while he was imprisoned he still managed to be a light for Jesus to some of the most unlikely of characters:

*And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear. Philippians 1:12-14 (NLT)*

That quotation is from the book of Philippians- a book Paul most likely wrote after his letter to the Colossians. It sounds like the prayers of the Colossian church had an impact, doesn't it? Regardless of Paul's circumstances God could still work miraculously through Paul- even in prison. How is that possible? Well, researchers have discovered that there's a danger in our recliners.

What I mean by that is that everyone loves those moments when we get to take it easy and relax. But if that's all we do it turns out it's not good for us. This is true for all life. Trees that

are put in ideal circumstances with no wind and no challenges don't thrive to the extent that trees that are subjected to hardships do. If a tree grows up without the benefit of storms and the wind that accompanies them then it never puts down solid roots. At least not solid enough to keep the wind from knocking it down. You've heard the phrase bend-but-don't-break? The saying came from trees. If they've weathered storms for their entire existence then when the wind comes they will bend-but-not-break. But if they haven't and a storm comes along it will mow that tree over not much effort.

Turns out we are the same way. Too much ease is not good for us. We need hardships and the storms of this life to make us strong and able to thrive in this broken world. Otherwise the first stiff wind that comes long will put us down on the ground. Hard times aren't fun but they are absolutely necessary if we're going to become everything dreamed of us becoming when He created us. So let's finish strong together- no matter what season of life you find yourself in when you read this. It turns out that Jesus is constantly placing open doors in our path but most of time we don't see the open door or when we see it we refuse to walk through it because it looks hard or boring or scary. So let's you and me start trying to live with an awareness that there are open doors all around us- we just have to figure out how to make sure which doors are the doors Jesus wants us to walk through and which ones are from another source. Let's spend today reflecting on where we see ourselves in the race of life (are you closer to the starting line or closer to the finish line?) and when was the last time you asked God to show you the open doors He wants you to walk through. And as you're contemplating that hear these words of Jesus- He's the only one who can open these doors and when He's opened a door there is nobody else that can close it:

*I have placed before you an open door that no one can close. Revelation 3:8 (CEV)*

**Wednesday Reflection:** So Jesus is the only one who can open doors of opportunity and once He's opened a door nobody can close it but Him. Then why aren't we just constantly seeing open doors all around us? A couple of reasons. First if we're not paying attention and looking for open doors we'll miss them when we see them. And there's also the matter of our own timid hearts. In other words, often we may see the open doors that Jesus places before us but we refuse to go through them for one reason or another (fear, laziness, a desire to find your own door, etc.). That brings us to today's reflection- while it's true that only Jesus can open doors of opportunity, it's also true that only I can open the door to my heart. It's the one door in the universe that Jesus can't (or maybe it's better to say He won't) open for you.

I think it's part of what it means that we are created in the image of God. We determine what we will and won't allow into our hearts. There is no parent, sibling, friend, mayor, president, or dictator that can open that door for you or force you to open it. Jesus gives you complete autonomy to open the door to your heart, or not. When Jesus is dictating His 7 letters to the 7 churches of Asian Minor He says something kind of interesting:

*Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in. Revelation 3:20 (NLT)*

I know, Jesus could kick down the door to your heart and it would fly open with no effort whatsoever on His part. But He makes it pretty clear He won't do that. He's given us that

authority. And it's interesting to me that earlier in Revelation chapter 3 (while dictating a letter to another church in Asia Minor) He says something we looked at yesterday:

*I have placed before you an open door that no one can close. Revelation 3:8 (CEV)*

Strange huh? He knocks at the door to our hearts but when it comes to doors of opportunity he opens and closes them at will. It's interesting- I always thought this verse was written to unbelievers who hadn't yet decided to make Jesus their Lord. And while the concept certainly applies to those who are not yet followers of Jesus, it's not who He's singling out in this letter. This letter is written to Christians who have stopped moving forward. Who have stopped making progress (I resemble that remark by the way). Jesus says they've stopped and that just won't do, so He says open up and I'll come in and we'll start moving forward again. You open your door, and I'll show you another open door (one that nobody else can open or close) and you will move step by step into a future you can't even imagine.

And you will begin to discover why Jesus made you the way He made you. You will discover what this life is really supposed to be all about. And that's the only way that this world will ever truly make sense to you. Why is that? Because it's what you were created for:

*It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone.*

*Ephesians 1:11-12 (MES)*

Want to discover why God made you the way He did and why He chose this place and time for you? Well then all you have to do is open the door to your heart and when you do there will be another door that Jesus has opened and waiting for you. But you might not yet be to where you can see the open door. I don't know why but my experience has been that there's one more step necessary to me actually starting to notice when there's an open door that Jesus has placed in front of me. We'll spend the next two days looking at that final step but for today maybe you and me could spend some time reflecting on why Jesus refuses to kick down the door to our hearts when we refuse to open them and what might happen if I did open that door and let Him in.

**Thursday Reflection:** So far this week we've talked a lot about open doors. We looked at how only God can open doors of opportunity and how only we can open the door to our hearts. I told you yesterday that if you are interested in going through any doors that Jesus opens for you but you aren't seeing any yet then there might be one more step we need to take in order to actually start seeing these open doors- ask Him to show you:

*And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.*

*Luke 11:9-10 (NLT)*

What's Jesus' advice if you can't see any open doors of opportunity in your life? Ask, seek, knock. And don't stop asking or seeking or knocking. Eventually your persistence will pay off (according to Jesus). But as you ask, seek and knock don't forget that Jesus' idea of a door of

opportunity might not look exactly like your idea of a door of opportunity. In fact Jesus' answers to our asking, seeking and knocking might not look appealing to you at all. Instead of a door of opportunity it might look more like a door of adversity. It may look like a door that you have tried avoiding your entire life.

And that may be the problem.

I can't tell you how many times God's doors of opportunity in my own life were doors I had tried avoiding all my life. But I can tell you how many times God was right and I was wrong (about the difference between a door of opportunity and a door of adversity)- every single time God was right. I know, shocking right? Who would've thought the one who designed me and created me and has cared for me every day of my life would know me better than I know myself? I can't tell you how many times in my life I've had my eyes opened to a reality I just had never considered before.

There's a great story about a prophet from the Old Testament named Elisha. Elisha was hated by the King of Aram (an ancient nation to the north of Israel about where Syria is) because he was better than the best spy when it came to figuring out what the enemy armies were about to do. The King of Aram was constantly trying to attack Israel at a weak point but God would warn Elisha where the next attack was going to be and Elisha would tell the King of Israel who would then spring a trap on the armies of Aram when they attacked. So the king of Aram decides he's going to kill Elisha. When he finds out Elisha is in Dothan (a little town in northern Israel) he sends his armies to surround the city and kill Elisha.

The Aramean armies surround Dothan in the middle of the night and when Elisha's servant wakes up the next morning and sees the thousands of enemy soldiers he's completely freaked out and thinks they're all going to die. But Elisha is eerily calm. He tells his servant not to worry because there are more fighting on God's side than on the king of Aram's side. The servant doesn't seem to believe Elisha so this is what happens next:

*Then Elisha prayed, "O Lord, open his eyes and let him see!" The Lord opened the young man's eyes, and when he looked up, he saw that the hillside around Elisha was filled with horses and chariots of fire. 2 Kings 6:17 (NLT)*

This story is the inspiration for the song Open The Eyes Of My Heart Lord. Elisha prayed that God would open the eyes of his servant and God does exactly that. Maybe that's the part of this equation we're missing- the whole asking-God-to-show-you part. Maybe what we need is to simply ask God to open the eyes of our hearts so that we can see the open doors that are all around us. I'll tell you a story tomorrow where someone decided to try this and the absolutely wild results from their experiment but for today maybe you and I could spend some time reflecting on how persistent we've been at asking, seeking and knocking.

Has it ever occurred to you to ask God to show you the open doors He has placed before you. He wants you to see them you know. This isn't some kind of test that only the purest hearts can pass. This is an invitation for all. Yes it's true that the more you and I practice asking, seeking and knocking the better results we will get. Not because God makes you work for it first (at least I don't think that's the main problem) but because we have to get used to seeing through the eyes of our hearts rather than only trusting what our physical eyeballs

can see. And that's probably the last part of the equation that we need to talk about- the willingness to walk through the open doors of opportunity that Jesus places before you. Because the more you walk through those doors the clearer each successive door will be to you. But the opposite is true too, you know. If you ask God to show you the open doors He's placing before you but you decide not to walk through them when He shows them to you then those open doors will become increasingly difficult to see. So call out to God and ask Him to show you the open doors in your life that He wants you to walk through:

*Call to me and I will answer you and show you great and unsearchable things you do not know. Jeremiah 33:3 (NIV)*

He wants desperately to show you these great and unsearchable things. But you've got to call out to Him and you've got to walk through them when He shows you.

**Friday:** So we reach the end of our week looking at Jesus and open doors. We've learned this week that only Jesus can open doors of opportunity in our lives. But there's one door He can't/won't open- the door to your heart. That responsibility He leaves with each one of us. Then we looked at the idea of asking God to show us the open doors of opportunity He's placing in front of us and I told you yesterday I'd tell you a story about how that experiment worked out for one guy in a remarkable way.

There was a guy named Bob Hunt who lived in Washington D.C. and he was sort of believer in Jesus but in a cursory sort of way. More like a fan than a follower/disciple. He had a good friend named Doug Coe who was a minister in DC. One day he was talking to Doug and Bob asked him if he really believed in the power of prayer to open doors in our lives. Doug replied with an enthusiastic "yes!" But Bob wasn't so sure. He had prayed for lots of things in his life but hadn't really seen much of difference when all was said and done. So Doug made Bob a deal. He said, "Bob, I'll bet you \$500 that if you pray every day for 45 days that God would open doors in your life that He will do just that." Bob figured this was easy money but he told Doug he wasn't sure what to pray for. So Doug just told him to pick something.

There was a map of the world hanging on the wall in Doug's office so Bob looked at it and decided he'd pray for open doors in Africa. Doug was curious- why Africa? Bob assured him it was completely random. But Doug thought Africa was too general a topic so he asked Bob to narrow it down somewhat. Bob took another look at the map and chose Uganda as the focus of his prayers. "Why'd you choose Uganda, Bob? Have you ever been to Uganda?" The answer was no. "Well do you know someone in Uganda?" The answer was once again no. "Then why are you praying for open doors in Uganda, Bob?" Bob reminded Doug that he asked him to pick a topic and Bob did that so lighten up, pastor boy.

Doug says to Bob, "fine. Then you pray for the next 45 days for God to open doors for you in Africa and if after those 45 days are up you don't believe that God has opened any doors for you in Uganda I will pay you \$500. But if God does open doors for you then we'll be square. In other words Bob was in no danger of having to pay Doug \$500. So Bob agreed. Every day he prayed that God would open doors in Uganda for him.

A few days later Bob was invited to one of those dinners that DC is famous for where a bunch of very polite people sit around eating chicken or salmon and listening to people talk about

stuff they don't really care that much about. Bob hated these dinners so he always tried to strike up a conversation with whoever was sitting next to him. So he turned to the lady sitting next to him and asks her where she's from. Her answer? Uganda.

Bob was a bit stunned at this turn of events. He immediately began peppering her with questions about Uganda. The lady says to him, "you are very interested in my country- you must have visited there a lot." Nope. "Oh, then you must know somebody in my country." Nope. "Then why are you so interested in Uganda?" To which Bob replies, "well I've got this friend named Doug who kind of paying me \$500 to pray for Uganda every day for 45 days but I'm starting to get the sneaking suspicion that I'll never see a penny of that money.

It turned out that the woman ran an orphanage in Uganda and she invited Bob to visit whenever he liked. Bob accepted (because it seemed like an open door to him) and while he was there he realized their greatest need was for medicine. Well Bob worked with lots of pharmaceutical companies and he thought maybe he'd be able to help out. Somehow he got these pharmaceutical companies to donate tons of medicine for the orphanage. Sometime after he had come back to the states from Uganda he got a call from the lady that ran the orphanage. What Bob had done made national headlines and the government wanted to host a dinner with Bob as the guest of honor. Well, that sounded like another open door so Bob walked through it.

While he was in Uganda Bob was invited by the president (Idi Amin- one of the most brutal dictators the world has ever known) to take a tour of the county with him in his private limousine. And even though that sounded kind of scary to Bob it also sounded like another open door so Bob walked through that one. While they were out driving around seeing the sites Bob noticed a bunch of prisoners on the side of the road doing hard labor. He asked who those guys were. Idi Amin told him they were political prisoners. So Bob asked what they had done. Idi Amin told him they were arrested because they were Christians and had been stirring up dissent in Uganda. Bob without really thinking about it said, "well that's not cool. You should let them go." The president looked at him kind of funny but didn't say a word.

Eventually Bob ended up back at home when he got a call from the US State Department. Here's how that conversation went:

- Is this Bob?
- Yes.
- Bob, this is the US State Department. Were you recently in Uganda?
- Yes.
- And while in Uganda did you meet the president and take a tour of the city with him?
- Yes.
- And did you say anything to the president about some political prisoners while you were with him, Bob?
- Yes.
- What'd you say, Bob?
- I told him, "that is not cool you should let them go. Why do you ask?"

- Because Bob, he just let all those people go. And when he was asked why he decided to release the prisoners he said, "well there's this guy I met named Bob and he was kind of the inspiration for the release.

And those released political prisoners returned to their homes and continued preaching the gospel in their communities. It sparked a spiritual revolution of sorts in Uganda that has made that infamous country in Africa into a hotbed of Christianity. And it was all because Bob was willing to try the experiment of asking God to open doors for him.

So how about you? Are you willing to pray for 45 days that God will open doors for you? If you've already got a great dream then ask God to open doors for you there. And if you don't? Pick something. Even if it has to be random like Bob picking Uganda because it was on a map. If you are willing to accept this challenge then I'll make you this promise- if you pray for 45 days that God will open doors for you then at the end of that 45 days if God hasn't clearly opened some doors for you then Aniela Humpheries will pay you, \$500!

Ok so I didn't ask Aniela (my associate pastor at Riverside) if she was ok with that plan but what could go wrong, am I right? So let's start right now. Pick something to ask, seek and knock and then together we'll start asking, seeking and knocking.