

Watching for Open Doors

by Scott Wieking

Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Phil. 2:4

Recently, my wife Kim and I were talking about our neighbors and our desire to be a light in our neighborhood. Like us, our neighbors are living busy lives, attending to the stuff of life. From a distance it seems that all our neighbors are doing just fine. As we talked Kim said something that caught my attention. “If you think that your neighbors have no needs, just wait.” She was right. Shortly after that discussion we heard about a neighbor who may be losing her job. About the same time a neighbor confided in Kim about her personal struggles in fighting a debilitating illness. Still later we learned of another neighbor who is overwhelmed with parenting her daughters and caring for her aging mother. Most recently, our neighbors across the street just welcomed their fourth child into their home. Suddenly, needs abound!

The Stress of Our Lives

Kent Humphries in his book, *Show and Then Tell*, says that big events in people's lives trigger needs, which can provide open doors for us to express Christ's love. He says, “Often a felt need is the open door that prepares a person to acknowledge his deeper, real need and Christ's solution to it.” In his experience, Kent has found seven types of circumstances that swing open the doors of opportunity to love and help people.

They are:

- Physical needs, specifically illness or hospitalizations
- Grief caused by any great loss such as death or divorce
- Marital difficulties
- Birth of a child
- Financial difficulties
- Problems with children
- Holidays

Open Doors

When difficulties arise, people are especially open to simple acts of kindness. At the top of that list is the simple act of listening. Offering a listening ear is surely one of the easiest and most meaningful ways we can express the love of Christ. Listen to what Jim Henderson has to say about giving our attention to others:

“People crave attention. In our cultural setting it's like the cup of cold water Jesus referred to in Matthew 10:42, where he said, “If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple...he will certainly not lose his reward.” When we *pay attention* to people because we want to nudge them toward Jesus, it refreshes them. It becomes the connecting bridge between them and God. Best of all, instead of asking them for something—their time, attention and interest—we give them something—our time, attention and interest. We serve them a small taste of Jesus's desire to attend to them.”

The night we heard from our next-door neighbor that she may be losing her job, we were just finishing dinner when we received the call. First we chatted about a small neighborhood issue. Then she confided in me that she had just been informed that her department at work was likely to be phased out in the coming months. I asked a few questions and listened as she poured her heart out. At the end of the conversation I assured her that both Kim and I would pray for her. She seemed to appreciate it. I quickly related the phone call to Kim and sat wondering what else we could do to encourage her and let her know that we cared. I knew that she had just arrived home from a long day of work and probably had nothing planned for dinner. I eyed a plate of leftover bbq chicken that would have made for a great lunch for the next day. I

turned to Kim and suggested that perhaps she should take over a plate of dinner. Kim agreed, gathered things together and headed next door. During that visit Kim had a chance to listen and encourage our neighbor. We found out days later through a thank you note how much that simple act meant to her.

Not all my stories are success stories. For every time I have responded to a need that God makes me aware of, there are several other times when I am simply oblivious to them. Whether its busyness, or pure selfishness on my part, the truth is that often I miss the open door opportunities that God brings across my path. So how can someone like me grow more aware of the opportunities around me? Again, Kent Humphries offers helpful insights:

“Being aware of the needs of others is sometimes difficult. Such awareness may not come naturally, yet God can develop your sensitivity. I realized early that sensitivity is not a natural strength of my personality type; in fact, normally it is nonexistent. Being a hard driver who tends naturally to run over people on the way to a goal, I work hard at developing this characteristic. You may need to focus on developing that sensitivity. Here are several methods to help us increase our sensitivity to others.

Increasing our sensitivity through prayer: First, *we can pray for people*, especially by name. Often I would hear of a family in need, and I promised that I would pray for them. A week or two later, when I would see them again, I remembered that I had good intentions, but had not prayed. So, I began the practice (nearly fifteen years ago) of writing down needs on a 3x5 card, taking seriously my commitment to pray. When God began to answer these prayers, I started to get excited and wanted to do it even more....

Increasing our sensitivity through acts of kindness: Second, *give encouragement*. Look for ways, however small, to encourage others. It is encouraging when someone will stop by another's desk for a brief "good morning" and a smile. A person feels special when a friend inquires about his child, his progress on a project, or his spouse's ball game last night. A note of support, encouragement, or congratulations left on a coworker's desk or a teenager's table does wonders for the person's outlook.

Increasing our sensitivity through giving gifts: ...Giving a card, magazine article, or book puts your focus on others, and finding the right one will make you more sensitive to their needs. When possible, choose greeting cards and other literature that are based on God's Word. Surprisingly, we found that this simple encouragement was so rare that people were overwhelmed. God began to heal them physically and emotionally; many were able to receive specific promises from cards, the Scriptures, and booklets. We began to understand that we were just a conduit for God's love to those around us.”

The ways each of us serve and care for people will vary from person to person, depending upon our personalities, experience, and means. The important thing is not how we do it, but will we do it. One thing that has encouraged me greatly is knowing that every kindness I show another person matters to God. No matter how small, it all matters to him. The privilege of joining him in caring for others, even in my small and imperfect ways, is bringing a new joy to my life that I am just beginning to discover. I pray the same for you.

Recommended:

Evangelism without Additives by Jim Henderson (Water Brook Press)

Show and Then Tell: Presenting the Gospel through Daily Encounters by Kent Humphreys (Moody Press)