



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### **The Wide Door of Opportunity**

**1 Corinthians 16:9**

**by Matt Hook**

**(Hum the theme song to the Munsters)...**

If you are a child of pop culture of the 60s, you know the theme song I've just been humming... Yes. The Munsters. The black and white sitcom of a very normal, very strange, and very funny family, in which each person in the family was a classic monster a la Boris Karloff. Except for Marilyn, who was a beautiful blonde that the rest of the family felt sorry for because in their eyes, she was homely.

**Do you remember how the show started? It started with a door.** Lily, the mom, literally the bride of Frankenstein would come to the door and see everyone out. First would come Grandpa, the Bella Lagosie of the family, always carrying his shovel sideways, getting stuck in the doorway every episode until he righted his shovel. Then Eddie, the junior bat boy, and Marilyn would each come through. Last would come Herman Munster with his black metal lunch box, who would just smash through the entire door frame.

**TV wasn't my only experience with doors. Growing up 3<sup>rd</sup> out of 4 kids, and the youngest boy of the family, I know a couple other things about doors.** First, I know that when all of them at our house were locked, I was the one they shoved through the milk chute to unlock the house. And second, I know that I never got to sit next to one. In the car, that is. I was always stuck in the back seat between my older siblings, Wes and Marci. I got the hump. And they tickled me and teased me mercilessly. My younger sister Jaema was safe. She got to sit in between my folks in the front seat. Half the time she would sit on the armrest. (And I thought she was safe!)

**But today** we're not talking about the Munsters. We're not talking about a milk chute – sized door. We're not talking about a car door, We're talking about a wide door. (My southern friends say "wahhhhd door." Say that with me: "wiiide door.")

**Some of you know we were in England this past month, which is the birthplace of Methodism.** You may know John Wesley started it all there and that the word "Methodist" was an insult. Like any good Methodist preacher, I visited the Wesley Chapel in London, where John Wesley preached later on in his life. What you may not know, is that during a critical time in his life, shortly after his conversion at Aldersgate, Mr. Wesley wrote a group of Christians had visited called the Moravians in Herrnhut, Germany, quoting this morning's verse, 1 Corinthians 16:9: "*For a wide door for effective service has opened for me, and there are many adversaries.*"

**John Wesley was quoting the Apostle Paul, the one who wrote this letter to the church in Corinth.** He wrote the letter *from* the city of Ephesus, letting the Corinthians know that his plans had changed, and he would be staying in Ephesus "until Pentecost." At that time, Ephesus was one of the major cities of Rome. It was where 3 great roads came together. (I can see it now: Dexter-Ann Arbor Road, Dexter-Chelsea Road, and Dexter-Pinckney Road). Ephesus was the Las Vegas of the ancient world, only much worse. Artemis was the goddess of Ephesus, and the living God had called Paul there. Paul had one of his longest stays, and

though he had been planning to travel to Corinth and beyond, he decided to remain in Ephesus, because “a wide door for effective service” had opened for him.

**Some people think the door is closing on Christianity in the world. But I want you to know today, in 2003, we’ve got a lot to celebrate. There is a wide door for effective service for us as Christians.**

- In Africa today there are 360 million Christians. In 2025 they predict 600 million.
- In South America today there are 400 million Christians. In 2025 they predict 640 million.
- The Methodist Movement worldwide is growing by 1 million per year. And it’s happening in surprising places. Places like Cuba, Korea, Brazil, and Bulgaria.
- Bulgaria has a coffee house in the Muslim section of one of their major cities, begun by the Methodists. Under communism in Bulgaria, all but two Methodist churches were closed. The District Superintendent was in prison for 12 years after the wall went up. But they now have 30 new congregations. At the end of the Soviet era, there were no pastors left. But there was Burgas. He was an electrician who was an elder in one of the small Methodist churches that survived. A Christian layman, a Methodist, Burgas gave away 4000 New Testaments between 2 and 4am every year. When the wall went down, the Methodist Church made him a pastor. And in the midst of a Muslim city, he is planting a church. Evangepeace Church, because, in *his* words, “There has to be a better way.”

**There is also wide door for effective service in Dexter.**

For years and years, God has been doing tremendous work here in the lives of people in Dexter. God has been transforming lives through this church. Dexter UMC has been offering effective service to people in need, sharing the gospel in words and deeds. And now, not because we needed it, but simply because of the way God has worked in these past few months, we’re standing on the threshold of another great opportunity: a wide door, for effective service.

**What is effective service?** Let’s break it down. The Greek word “*energes*” means active, at work. It’s where we get our word energy. “*Service*” in scripture refers to working for someone, anything from serving in God’s temple to working in the military, “the service.” Paul felt he needed to stay in Ephesus because God had opened an opportunity that Paul made his priority; an active, effective, work for God.

**Have you ever thought that you may have been put on earth to be in God’s effective service?** Jesus gave us our marching orders: the Great Commandment and the Great Commission: to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. And in his final words to the disciples he said “Go make disciples of all nations, teaching them and baptizing them in my name.” Hm. Where have I heard that before? Oh yes – the mission statement of DUMC.

**Effective service in Dexter means sharing Jesus by your life and your words.**

- Helping those in need, even though you are busy.
- Taking care of the poor and oppressed.
- Showing people that God is crazy about them. Even your family members who make you crazy.
- Serving the community by providing uplifting, inspiring worship.
- Forgiving those who need it. Even those who have hurt you most.
- Pointing to the truth. Even when it is painful.
- Looking to the future. Even when you feel backed into a corner.

And today God has given you a wahhhde door for this. It’s happening, and God wants you a part of it! There’s a wide door of opportunity in your life, and in Dexter.

**But in the same breath that Paul says there's a wide door, he notes there are many adversaries.**

1. There are problems to be solved.
2. There are dangers to be faced.
3. There are difficulties to be overcome.
4. These adversaries come from many places: the world or society.
5. They come from *within the church*.
6. They can even come from within ourselves. The most significant ones come from here. We've had many wars in the world, but the biggest battles are all fought and won, or lost, inside the human heart.
7. Like Paul, we have adversaries:
  - a. Satan
  - b. The world
  - c. Our sinful, selfish nature.

**We must go through the door.**

Why don't we?

Because people prefer the pain of a predictable situation to the freedom of an unknown one.

Some of us would rather spectate than participate.

Maybe you feel like you don't have even one opportunity in the world.

Maybe your door looks more like a wall.

Hear the Good News: Your past does not have to equal your future!

Today is the day of salvation. God is offering you a chance to receive him. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus says *'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.'*

After Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians about the wide door of opportunity in Ephesus, the ministry exploded. Within a generation, the center of mission moved from Jerusalem to Ephesus. John, the last of the 12 disciples, became bishop of Ephesus, and was later exiled to Patmos, where he wrote the book of Revelation. In that book, John writes this to the church in Ephesus:

*"I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for my name's sake, and have not grown weary.*

*But this I have against you, that you have left your first love.* (Rev. 2:2-5). (Interestingly enough, 30 years earlier, this church had been commended for its love in the letter to the Ephesians. (1:15-16)). That could be us. We could rest on what Bill and Steve have led the congregation to do. But today a wide door is open. What kind of door? (Wahhhd).

**When John Wesley was 83, he wrote an article entitled, "Thoughts about Methodism."** He reflects on the vitality of the movement. He wrote, "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case, unless they hold fast to both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out."

We exist “That the world may know Jesus the Christ.” We exist that Dexter and the surrounding region may know Jesus the Christ.

**I have to tell you: I am so excited to be here.** I’ve been preparing for it, praying for you, dreaming of it. I really feel like God’s hand is in this. It’s a WIDE door. Today I believe Jesus has opened this new door for us. He asks you and me today, “Dexter, will you walk through it?” Will you give what you have – your time, your talents, your gifts, and your service?

**The Statue of Liberty quotes the last stanza of an old poem.** “Send me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the reckless refuse of your teeming shore, I lift my lamp beside the golden door.” Folks, we’ve got a golden door of opportunity before us.

The best that America can offer is temporary freedom. But Jesus Christ can offer freedom for eternity. “A wide door for effective service is open, but there are many adversaries.”

**Let us pray:** Heavenly Father, Lord God, thank you...Satan would not have any power, any threshold, any foothold. God bless us. Satan would be thwarted, and the Lord Jesus would be made famous. Amen.