

Defending the Faith



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September 2018

Open Doors

Every day, we are faced with decisions to make. Some may be significant milestones in our lives and others are just ordinary daily decisions. Some decisions are difficult to make, and others may require little thought on our part. Often, it is God who places choices in our path. *“Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut”* (Revelation 3:8). The key is to “look” for those open doors, especially if we struggle to choose between what is the right thing to do and what is not.

Often, God places open doors in our path in life, which eventually lead to greater faith in our lives, particularly when we experience tribulations. However, we frequently neglect to involve God in our decisions. *“If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you”* (James 1:5). Wisdom is always necessary in making decisions in our lives, especially important ones. God can give us insights, which we may not have considered. In addition, we should always wish to do God’s will, which always benefits us. God blesses those who do His will. *“I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live”* (Deuteronomy 30:19). Our lives are filled with choices that lead to blessings or curses, depending on whether we obey the will of God. God does not curse us, but if we make poor choices, we often suffer from the consequences of our decisions.

When we are conflicted in making a decision, God will reveal His will to us. *“And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it”* (Isaiah 30:21). How can we know? How can we hear God’s voice? When we resist God’s will, we will remain conflicted, but when we choose God’s will, *“the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy”* (James 3:17). A feeling of peace is a sure sign that we are making the right decision.

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Open Doors (cont'd)

If we continue to struggle over our decision or if God places the same open door in our path more than once, we should then consider our motivations for our choices. *“All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit (heart)”* (Proverbs 16:2). Are we being selfish? Are we resisting an opportunity for God to work through us? God’s will is always focused on our salvation or the salvation of others. If God opens a door for us, it is because He loves us. *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths”* (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Doors can also be opened by the evil one. We need to recognize temptations when we encounter them. Generally, it is not too difficult to discern temptations, but it is sometimes difficult to recognize openings for us to grow in our faith or to help others grow in their faith. Many times, it is an opportunity to act in love. These can be missed opportunities, if we do not act at all. *“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him”* (Colossians 3:17).

Examples of open doors may include a change in jobs or residence. God may want to place you in a new environment, where you may bear more fruit or where you may grow in the Christian life. God may introduce you to a person who needs your wisdom or whose wisdom may benefit you. Perhaps a starving homeless person is sitting in front of the store you are about to enter. Perhaps a friend or loved one has taken ill, or maybe a friend is suffering due to a relationship problem. Maybe, you are experiencing hardship, where the wisdom of an outsider may help you put things into perspective. God may open a door for you to reconcile with a family member by asking for forgiveness or by offering forgiveness.

God’s purposes usually involve spiritual growth for us or for others. God is only concerned with our salvation. When those open doors present themselves, consider that God is opening that door, so that we can move closer to Him, closer to His love. When we walk through those open doors, we often discover how much we have been blessed by the experience. Our faith increases because we have encountered God. Our relationship to him becomes more intimate. We are able to trust in our Lord and future hardships become smaller bumps in our road through life. He gives us the strength



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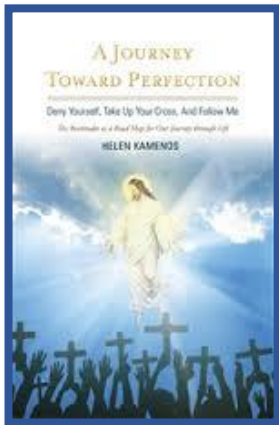
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Open Doors (cont'd)

and courage to persevere. No mountain is too great for God. Usually, deep down in our hearts, we know when the open door leads to our Lord. They are not coincidences. They are part of His plan for our lives. Look for those open doors God places in your path. *“Those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you.”* (Psalms 9:10).

May God bless you and keep you! May you grow in His wisdom and may you enter through those open doors with confidence and with hope! Remember, Christ is always knocking at the door of your heart.

Helen Kamenos
Readers' Favorite Author



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The Exaltation of the Holy Cross Celebrated September 14



It may seem strange that we venerate and honor the instrument of Christ's execution. Even many Christian denominations avoid displaying or wearing a cross. However, in God's wisdom, He chose to take on flesh and eventually die by crucifixion. Paradoxically, this instrument of torture and death has become our salvation. A pure and sinless Jesus offers us a new tree of life through the shedding of His precious blood, a divinely perfect sacrifice for our sins. Through the Cross, Christ triumphed over death, so that He may offer us eternal life.

The feast day actually celebrates the finding of Christ's genuine Cross. In 326 A.D., the Emperor Constantine sent his mother, Helen, to Jerusalem to locate the Holy Cross and the Holy Sepulcher where Christ was buried.

The following excerpt from <https://www.goarch.org/en/exaltation> recounts the story, which is also represented in the icon above:

“Relying upon the oral tradition of the faithful, Saint Helen found the precious Cross together with the crosses of the two thieves crucified with our Lord. However, Helen had no way of determining which was the Cross of Christ. With the healing of a dying woman who touched one of the crosses, Patriarch Macarius of Jerusalem identified the True Cross of Christ. Saint Helen and her court venerated the Precious and Life-Giving Cross along with many others who came to see this great instrument of Redemption.

The Patriarch mounted the ambo (pulpit) and lifted the Cross with both hands so that all of the people gathered could see it. The crowd responded with "Lord have mercy". This became the occasion of the institution in all of the Churches of the Exaltation of the Precious Cross, not only in memory of the event of the finding of the Cross, but also to celebrate how an instrument of shame was used to overcome death and bring salvation and eternal life.”

At the end of the Orthodox service celebrating the feast day, the congregation comes and venerates (kisses) the cross and receives basil from the priest. “The basil is used and offered, as it was the fragrant flower growing where the Cross was found (<https://www.goarch.org/en/exaltation>).”

The Cross reminds us of Christ's great sacrifice. It reminds us how much He loves us. It reminds us that Jesus willingly died for us so that we could be with Him eternally. This is the heart of the Good News. We rejoice in Christ's sacrifice. We praise Him for His wisdom. We worship Him as our Lord and Savior, our God, Jesus Christ!

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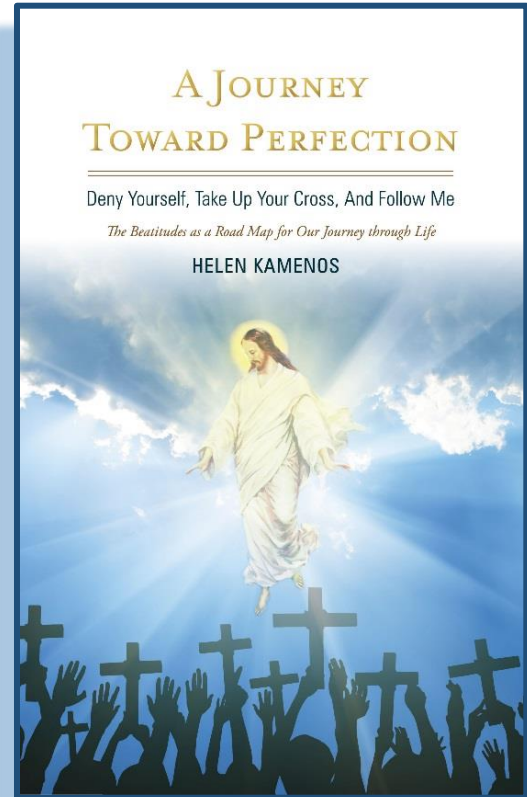
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A Journey Toward Perfection

The Beatitudes from Matthew 5:

- ³ *Blessed are the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
- ⁴ *Blessed are those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.*
- ⁵ *Blessed are the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.*
- ⁶ *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.*
- ⁷ *Blessed are the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy.*
- ⁸ *Blessed are the pure in heart,
For they shall see God.*
- ⁹ *Blessed are the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.*
- ¹⁰ *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
- ¹¹ *"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and
say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.*
- ¹² *Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward
in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were
before you.*



A *Journey Toward Perfection* reveals a path toward developing an intimate experiential relationship with God. It is an in-depth study of the attributes of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5. These are the attributes God bestowed upon us when He created us in His image. God created us to love. These are the traits necessary to love others as God loves us. These characteristics are central to our Christian spiritual growth. Discover how these attributes can sustain you through the many trials and tribulations of your life. Comprehend how love truly conquers all. Experience God's true presence in your life.

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