**KNOCK, KNOCK**

Phil Van Auken

The Bible is chock full of advice for how to keep dry on the leaking ship that is our world today. By cobbling these four scriptures together, we can make a heavenly life preserver just in case your ship springs a big leak.

In Colossians, Paul admonishes us to ignore the me-oriented human philosophies that make a M-E-S-S of our life, with M for Materialism; E for Ego; S for Status; and another S for Self-interest. It was only after proud Pharisee Paul encountered Christ that he became what our third reading from Psalm 138 calls a lowly, or humble, person. Thanks to Christ, Apostle Paul jumped off his pharisaical ship just before it sank.

Genesis gives a big cheer to Abraham for arguing long enough with God for assuring that his chosen people would safely exit Sodom. God’s faithful people are still relying on his safe-keeping from today’s new Sodoms.

Luke’s gospel reminds us how the lowly among us wait patiently on God mercies on day at a time. Throughout the ages, the common people couldn’t rely on money, power, or social status to survive in deep waters, so they set sail on God’s unsinkable ship.

Our world has never been run by humble people. Earth still rotates around feuding nations, unforgiving armies, money-oozing corporations, hollow politicians, worshipped celebrities, and corrupt institutions. The doors of capitalists open only when you spike their profits. The doors of public institutions are often slammed in the faces of lowly Americans. Some churches lock their doors to sinners.

But lest we forget, right on this here gyrating planet there is also a kingdom whose gates are open to everyone regardless of social standing or sins—Christ’s eternal kingdom of hope and tolerance. In fact, according to Christ’s Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount, the pure in heart shall see the King at work in his earthly kingdom.

God opens his gates to any and all who are humble enough to knock on them in Christ’s name. Sometimes it takes only a light tap to open God’s door to an answered prayer. Other times a brisk knock is required, or even a real knuckle rapping. When God keeps his heavenly door closed to us it’s because we’ve banging on the wrong door. He makes us wait while he opens a different door with much better outcomes than we prayed for.

God know Miquel needed a job. As a recent college graduate naïve to the world’s quicksand, he knocked and knocked on employment doors but few opened. “What company would hire me? Miquel asked himself. “Apparently I can’t even impress people in a job interview. Am I that unskilled? I really don’t know what to do now.”

Ah, but Miquel did know. A humble prayer welled up in his mind: “Lord, find me a place to work where I can make positive contributions to others and enough money to meet my basic needs. Please find me an employer who can genuinely benefit from my work, whatever that might be. Amen.” Would you hire Miquel? A company sore in need of a bilingual customer representative did just three days later.

Alice didn’t get the promotion she’d been seeking for many months. “Why aren’t my prayers being answered” she muttered. Ah, but they were. A month later everyone in her department was permanently laid off, including Alice. “That’s an answer to prayer?” exclaimed Alice.

You bet it was. God knew that both Alice and her husband wanted her to stay home with their two pre-schoolers. But one pay check wasn’t enough—until now. Her husband just received a significant promotion, with a larger paycheck big enough to financially provide for the whole family. God’s perfect timing gave Alice’s family a new lease on life. And she thanked God for his providence and patience, despite her impatience—kinda like Abraham, huh?

For the third month in a row, Steve missed his sales quota, and this time it cost him his job. All his hard work and long hours weren’t enough for his highly-competitive employer. For the next several weeks, Steve bounced around job placement agencies, impersonal Personnel offices, and the want-ads. But the doors didn’t open. Discouraged, his mind flirted with changing careers--but what career?

An employment agency administered Steve a psychological inventory to assess his professional strengths, and it only verified what Steve already knew—he was cut out for sales. “But I just can’t face those quotas anymore,” he told his wife.

 On Tuesday, his former sales boss, Jason, took Steve out to lunch and mentioned a job opening in a small town 18 miles west. Before Jason could even give Steve the details, Steve impatiently asked if it was a sales job. Jason replied, “Well, yes and no.” And then Jason surprised Steve. “Steve, you weren’t one of our better salesmen, but you certainly excelled at motivating and organizing our reps, and I know they benefitted from it.” “But what’s that got to do with the job down the road”? Steve blurted out.

 “Steve, I’m convinced that your true talent is managing the sales force instead of doing the selling yourself. Great Western Industries down the road is looking for a new sales manager.” “But they don’t even know me, Steve interrupted. “They do now, “said Jason, “because I called them yesterday and gave you a mighty good recommendation.”

Several days later, Steve reported to his new job at Great Western and immediately demonstrated his gift for managing. Whether or not Steve realized it, Jason--whether or not he realized it-- had done God’s bidding for Steve.

God works in and through people all the time, whether or not they realize it. God prefers to work through people, not angels. If you’ve been prayerfully door knocking lately, look for someone new or unexpected to suddenly show up in your life. They may be there to carry out God’s plan for you even without knowing it. We’ve all opened doors for others without realizing that we were part of God’s plan.

Connie was a retired high school teacher looking for a way to still contribute to the lives of young people. She wondered if some school in town might benefit from her volunteer tutoring and life-mentoring skills. But in the back of her mind, Connie worried she was too old to make a difference. She visited several schools in her district, but they already had enough tutors, and besides she lacked state certification to tutor. But Connie persisted in knocking on doors, this time in her neighborhood offering to help kids with their homework. But nothing came of that either.

A few weeks later at a doctor’s appointment, Connie’s nurse, Kayla, mentioned a juvenile detention center in town that couldn’t hold on to teachers very long due to student-related discipline problems. Kayla told Connie that the center’s rookie teachers might welcome advice from a veteran comfortable with challenging students. And Kayla was right--the center’s teachers bonded with Connie right away. Even better, a number of the students all but adopted Connie to be the grandmother they never had.

Connie was definitely the right person in the right place--and she knew it was no coincidence. God used her serving spirit many times through the years for working with his lowly people. Connie is a good door knocker, and God is a good doorman.

Sometimes prayerful, faithful people become glum from knocking on latched doors. Eugene was one of them. He had lost much of his hearing and eyesight from a freak war injury in the Middle East, and despite desperate prayers on his behalf from family and friends, Eugene could no longer function normally. His life had permanently changed.

As time passed, things got bleaker for Eugene. He couldn’t land a steady job, and he gave up plans to find a marriage partner. No miracles, no hope. Were God’s ears deaf to Eugene’s persistent knocking? Couldn’t he see Eugene’s struggles? What had Eugene done to deserve such a fate?

But little by little, Eugene’s spiritual eyes and ears began to see and hear God’s door opening for him. Gradually he realized he was now free. Free of worldly distractions and responsibilities. Free from fighting rush hour traffic to and from work. Free from keeping up with the Joneses. Free to befriend at-risk children after school. Free to minster to struggling people online and via texting. Free to share his faith in a merciful, gracious God with others.

When Eugene recalled Jesus saying that the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head, he suddenly understood what that meant for his own life. He now had the time, availability, and heart to minister to others in the power of God’s grace. Eugene had received a new, spiritual lease on life.

When he walked through God’s open door of humble service, he never imagined how much he would see and hear Jesus. He yearned to encourage hurting people by reminding them that leading a quote-unquote, normal life, was not God’s plan for everyone--and that quote-unquote success, is often helping others in small, invisible ways.

The doors of heaven open wide for all who wish to labor in Christ’s spiritual harvest fields. Christ is our door into the kingdom: “I am the way, and the truth, and the light.” And our unconditional love for others is the door that leads them to Christ. God’s blessings flow through us to those who need the same blessings. God creates circumstances that help others see Christ through us.

By the way, do you know what a prayerful word KNOCK really is? Prayerfully speaking, the letter K in knock stands for kindly; the N is for now; O is for open; the C stands for Christ’s; and the other K is for kingdom. Put them all together and it gives us a great way to start a care prayer. Just open your prayer with: Dear Lord: Kindly Now Open Christ’s Kingdom for—and then name the person or situation you‘re praying for.

Well, it’s time to close, so here’s what we’ve all been waiting for: a knock-knock prayer. I’ll start the prayer by saying knock-knock, and then I think you know your part! Ready?

KNOCK, KNOCK. (Who’s there?) A loving and gracious God who hears and responds to our prayers in the right way at the right time through the right people. Let us pray:

Dear Lord, Kindly Now Open Christ’s Kingdom to all those we have been praying for and caring for. Help them see Christ through us in our unconditional love and concern for them. Help us bless others as you have blessed us. Thank you for the heavenly grace constantly shining through your heavenly doors. Give us faith to keep knocking on your doors in the name of Christ, our Lord and Savior.