

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

"I have set before Thee an open door . . ."

By

J. Paul Reno

Pastor and Author

Published by

Blessed Hope Publishers

Hagerstown, Md.

First Printing 1991

All Scripture quotations in this book are taken
from the *King James Version* of the Bible.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. Serious Sickness and/or Surgery..... | 06 |
| 2. Death in the Family | 07 |
| 3. Marriage and/or Home Problems | 08 |
| 4. Job Trouble | 09 |
| 5. Military | 10 |
| 6. Loneliness | 12 |
| 7. Religion without Satisfaction | 13 |
| 8. Birth of a Child | 16 |
| 9. War | 18 |
| 10. Economic Uncertainty, Troubles, Poverty, etc..... | 20 |
| 11. Exposure to Godly Saints | 22 |
| 12. Times of God's Special Moving | 24 |
| 13. Communion Services/Religious Holidays | 26 |
| 14. Break-up of the Family | 29 |
| 15. Refugees | 31 |
| 16. College Students | 33 |
| 17. Immigrants | 35 |
| 18. People in Need of Assistance | 38 |
| 19. Sufferers from Injustice | 41 |
| 20. Emotional Distress | 43 |
| 21. Depression | 45 |
| 22. Some Closing Thoughts | 47 |

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

II Cor. 1:3, 4 "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

What a delight it is that we can know the "**God of all comfort**". There is no trial but what He has sufficient comfort for us. This same comfort which He gives us is the same that we are to use to help the lost around us.

It is the will of God that we suffer tribulation so that we will have received comfort to help us reach the lost. The more tribulation we suffer the greater our opportunity for effective evangelism. No tribulation, no comfort needed, and no help for the lost! In all our struggles we should learn the nature of God's working in us that we might

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

know how to minister to those for whom we have been praying.

Just as God has us suffer tribulation, so He also will allow troubles into the life of the lost. These times of their suffering are often the times of their greatest openness. The Bible teaches us to “*watch and pray*”. We must learn how to recognize these times of openness, - watch for them and pray for wisdom and boldness.

Let us look at some of the times of trouble that create opportunities for witness. There are enough that you will see several in that one for whom you are praying.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

1. Serious Sickness and/or Surgery

Often God lays us on our backs to get us to look up. By their nature sickness and surgery introduce the nearness of eternity. Our value system often changes when we lose our health. The world loses appeal when life may be ending. Sometimes the sick realize emptiness to their life, wasted past, neglected opportunities, and/or a need for God.

Many scriptures have helped at times like these, and a careful, prayerful selection may open up an excellent opportunity. *Consider ... Psalm 23; John 14:1-6; John 9:1-7; II Cor. 5:1-9; Phil. 2:5-11, etc.*

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

2. Death in the Family

What more stark reminder of the shortness of life and the reality of eternity could we ask for than the death of a love one? These are times not only for mourning but also for examination. Gentleness and Christian manners are necessary to help with comforting. If the deceased was saved, the door usually opens up, ... they are far better off. If they were lost, the absence of comfort over them, despite statements otherwise, is a silent and sober warning. The issue is always more the need of the living than the state of the dead. We can't help the dead, but those who remain become our opportunity. Find the Scriptures God used to speak to your heart in a similar situation, and those are the ones you can best use for others. *Consider ... Psalm 23; John 14:1-6; Psalm 46; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Heb. 9:24-28; Heb. 2:14, 15, etc.*

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

3. Marriage and/or Home Problems

There may be an issue between husband and wife or parent and child, but God has a solution. Marriage and the home were creations of God, and He has set down rules for their proper operation. The violation of these rules will create trouble sooner or later. The issue is not if but when!

Make a careful study of the Bible teaching on these subjects so that you may be fully prepared when the opportunity arises. Apply the truths to your life that you may shine as a light and people will listen to you. Study especially ... **Eph. 5:22-6:4** and **I Pet. 3:1-7**.

Our generation is marked by a breakdown in the home. What an opportunity for evangelism! When a person's marriage unravels their whole way of living apart from God becomes meaningless. Be available and compassionate.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

4. Job Troubles

We live in a materialistic generation where a person's value is often defined by his/her job. While this is not good, it is all too often true. When a job is threatened or large problems arise at work, the individual may struggle with their identity. Often the lost one thinks more of their job than they do of God. Such trouble may help them realize that only God can make for stability and security. They must see beyond a God who helps on the job, to a God who wants full control in all areas of their life.

Be considerate and stay available. Remember the comfort you had when you faced such problems. *Consider ...* **Luke 3:1-14; Heb. 13:5-14; Eph. 6:5-9; II Thess. 3:1-15; James 5:1-11**, etc.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

5. Military

Young people in our armed services are often open to the Gospel. Removed from many hindrances and barriers to witness, we must be alert to this open door. Consider the young man or woman now away from parents, family, friends, community, culture, and religious ritual. They often are intensely lonely and open to gracious friendship and hospitality. They now are re-examining their value system and goals in life.

The military also is assisting us in teaching them a number of Christian concepts. Their susceptibility to fall into many grievous sins teaches the matter of depravity and one's sinful nature. Further, they learn obedience to a commander (Lordship), team work, working towards a common goal, unquestioning obedience, competition, sacrifice, suffering, hardship, and giving one's all. The Scriptures

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

use many military concepts, terms, and pictures as ours is a militant faith.

As a matter of encouragement, many pastors, missionaries, and church workers were first reached in the military. *Consider II Tim. 2:3, 4; Eph. 6:10-19; II Tim. 4:5-8; I Tim. 1:18, etc.*

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

6. Loneliness

Loneliness is far more common than even the lonely realize. Perhaps one third or more of American adults feel cut off and lonely. While many picture being alone as being away from others, often the opposite is true. Usually the bigger the city, the faster the pace of life, the busier one is, and the greater one's wealth, the greater the loneliness. Each of these factors opposes real friendships. Sometimes business is a cover for loneliness.

When we consider that a remedy for loneliness is friendship we know how to help this large group of the lost. There is no friend like Jesus! *Consider* **Prov. 18:24; Heb. 13:5, 6; Matt. 28:20; John 15:15**, etc.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

7. Religion Without Satisfaction

Many of those around us claim to be religious while it is obvious that they don't have Jesus. Usually there will come a time, perhaps short or perhaps long, when a dear soul finds their religion is empty and doesn't satisfy. Perhaps they see your comfort and help and are now curious. They may even approach the subject of their religion and your religion with, "*What is the difference?*" It is a blessing when the false peace and comfort are taken away. Yet, while it may be true, it may not be wise to point out that what they have is religion and we have Jesus. Usually this leads to a debate instead of a witness. The wiser approach may be to use the Scriptures to answer.

James 1 tells first of an empty and useless religion, because it doesn't control the tongue. For many it is a shock that religion could be a waste of time and energy. Next we are told of a

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

religion that is pure, not just to the eyes of men but before God Himself. It has three clear evidences:

- 1) Visiting and assisting the fatherless
- 2) Visiting and assisting the widows
- 3) Keeping oneself unspotted from the World.

The first two should be natural and helpful to those in need. While much of religion has at least token help offered, personal involvement is rarely found. Proper action in such is not only a way of opening doors of witness to the fatherless and widows, but also to family, friends, and neighbors. It also is noted by the community.

However, it is the third area that often reveals the difference between most religion and following Jesus. We not only are delivered from the World, and separated from the World, but keep ourselves unspotted from the corruptions

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

and filth of the World. This is beyond religion and requires the power of Jesus and His cleansing power. Our so-called strictness is actually a cleanness that testifies of God's power! This contrast opens the door gently yet clearly for the presentation of the Gospel.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

8. Birth of a Child

Coming in contact with the miracle of a child entering the world often helps people see the greatness and creative activity of our God. Marveling over such a precious gift is healthy for the hardest of souls. Sometimes the fact of a birth instead of an abortion is evidence of a fear of God or an answer to prayer.

This opportunity should be used not only to impress upon them the privilege and responsibility of raising an infant into an adult, but to lay before them several other truths. *Consider* the picture of the New Birth in **John 3**. Then there is the truth that we came from God and will one day return to Him to answer at the judgment (**Eccl. 12:7**). **Psalm 127** is often most welcomed by the parents and teaches that God maintains ownership of the children. They are only here on loan, and we need God's help even in the routine

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

duties of life. Also, children can be a source of happiness.

As the parents marvel, rejoice, and appreciate God's goodness, it becomes a good time to tell them of Jesus who loved the children and would save the parents from their sins.

Contacts at times like these often stay open many years. A witness to the child as he grows up is often acceptable because you were there in his first days. The parents may reject the Saviour, yet want the child and the youth to listen to you. You will always have that special bond.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

9. War

While times of peace are especially useful to the propagation of the Gospel, times of War can also be used. *Consider* that War often drives people to prayer and seeking God's help. When there seems no danger to country and loved ones, many sense no need for God. Now the future is most uncertain, and loved ones may die.

Specifically, there are a number of areas to consider:

- 1) Build-up of the military increases the opportunities previously mentioned.
- 2) Corresponding with lonely soldiers gives one-on-one opportunities.
- 3) Concern and aid to family and dependents left behind is a great need.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

- 4) Literature outreach into previously difficult or closed countries and to soldiers of allied armies from such countries may be an open door.
- 5) Ministry to refugees has much potential. Where there is war, there are always refugees.
- 6) Compassion to families where death strikes is more acceptable from strangers at times like this.
- 7) Disoriented, disillusioned, wounded, handicapped, forgotten, etc. are only a few possible words to describe soldiers returning home. Each could be an area of opportunity.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

10. Economic Uncertainty, Troubles, Poverty, etc.

The closer we come to the end of this age, the more uncertain will be the future of people, financially. Even when it seems like peace and safety, then sudden destruction will be close at hand.

The gods of materialism and security may very well be dying. When we can no longer trust the economy, we may start trusting God! He is a constant. He never changes (**Mal. 3:6**). He provides for the needs, not necessarily the wants, of His people (**Matt. 6:33**) when they seek first His Kingdom and His Righteousness.

In hard times, we have a God who demonstrates His compassion to us that the lost world might desire Him! He is not limited by our struggles and circumstances. He would have the world see His gracious provision. He would have

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

them realize the importance of His Kingdom when the kingdoms of the world fail. They can see illustrated the love of our ruling Lord to care for those who submit to Him.

We don't need of desire to live high, but we do live safe, secure, contented, and provided for according to the laws of our Kingdom. That is far more than the kingdoms of the world can produce on a consistent basis. Their kingdoms' failures are opportunities for us to speak of our King and Kingdom!

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

11. Exposure to Godly Saints

What we are is more important than what we do. We are light, salt, and witnesses (**Matt. 5:13, 14; Acts 1:8**). Only as we are right are we able to do right.

One of the great tools God uses is a saved sinner who now lives a separated holy life. Lost people usually become curious and will test to see if we “are for real”. While they often will act like they ignore us, they are certainly alert enough to catch us if we slip! Our presence should make them uncomfortable over their sin, yet they do find comfort in knowing someone who can pray for their needs in time of trouble. Most of their conversation is with their own kind, yet they appreciate someone who has Christian compassion when they want to unburden their hearts. Is it any wonder that we cause them to be confused?

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

It is normal for the lost to learn more of the character of Jesus by observing a saint than they are likely to learn by listening or reading. We may be showing them the only views of Jesus that they will every truly grasp. Our faithfulness is occasionally rewarded when they approach us with a question. We should be prepared with an answer (**I Pet. 3:15**). The frequency of these opportunities will likely be tied to the degree of our practical holiness.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

12. Times of God's Special Moving

Times of God's refreshing His saints usually spills over into the reaching of the lost. Revival of the saved, to whatever degree, is always associated with evangelism. Certain marks such as holy living, repentance of sin, a fear of God, strong praying, and a passion to reach the lost are common signs. Together they create a powerful force upon the lost. The moving of the Holy Spirit seems to intensify under such conditions with many blessed results such as concern, conviction, and conversion of those who previously seemed unconcerned (**Acts 2:17, 18, 41; 4:31; 6:7; 9:31;** etc.)

John Wesley observed that the harvest went only as far as there had been previous planting. Planting started during the Move rarely brought about conversion until a later time of stirring. The

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

laws of planting and reaping would well agree with this. The suggested conclusion is to plant the seed thoroughly and widely while praying for God's stirring. When the time of blessing arrives, then harvest as fully as possible. By adjusting to the seasons (as every farmer already understands), we can become co-laborers with God (**I Thess. 5:1; I Cor. 3:9**). Personal evangelism often lays the groundwork for the later conversion of many previous souls, as well as determining the limits a Move of God is likely to reach. As we adjust to the seasons like the tides of the ocean, we may see, once again, the great stirs of God in our midst.

The other side of the issue is that God rarely works in converting power until He first works among His people. We have a responsibility! (**Isa. 66:8**).

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

13. Communion Services and Religious Holidays

Historically these have proved to be useful seasons for reaching the lost. At such times, peoples' minds are open to the spiritual aspects of life, and the reality of Jesus. The lost are given an opportunity to see beyond the humdrum of daily routine in the rat race of materialistic living.

Communion Services bring God's people to examining themselves (**I Cor. 11:28**), Biblically, and this often leads to repentance, restoration, and renewal of zeal. The Service itself brings a remembrance of Jesus in His Mighty Works (**I Cor. 11:24, 25**), and a demonstration in type of the death of Jesus (**I Cor. 11:26**), that the lost might better see what has been done for them. When Communion is observed in a Biblical fashion, it provides a unique opportunity for the lost!

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

Religious holidays in the Old Testament were designed by God to help the Jewish people, as well as the Gentiles, look forward to the coming Saviour. That these were observed by many is also clear in a simple reading of the Old Testament Scriptures. Now that Jesus has come, there are certain times of the year when even the world takes note of His earthly arrival and ministry. That these times have been twisted by false religion and commercially exploited by materialistic businesses is obvious. No one who studies it could deny such. Despite the problems, people's attention still is turned to Jesus and we have a great opportunity to tell of the real Christ and what He has done. Every year these seasons roll around and an opportunity may be seized or neglected. Jesus used an event at the temple (not scripturally required or taught) during a feast to give a foundation to a message (**John 7:37-40**). Another time he spoke from the temple during a

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

feast for which there was only a historical foundation (**John 10:22**). He was ever alert to the opportunity as we should be.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

14. Break-up of the Family

A rapidly increasing tragedy in America is the break-up of homes through separations and divorces. Each case usually involves heartaches for the two adults, if there are children for each of them, and a host of relatives and friends. The God-ordained unit of the family is pulled apart with all the opportunities for the love, harmony, nurture, obedience, and blessings laid aside. The pictures of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Church are destroyed. The opportunity to see God's healing power to the home is put aside and the time of openness during the marriage problems is now past.

New challenges face the personal worker at this time. Confusion, devastation, bitterness, hurt, emptiness, and many other such-like emotions swirl around in the hearts of those involved. Rarely is blame accepted. Usually it is given to

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

others, and sometimes the reality of God is questioned, "*How can there be a God?*" Or, "*Where was God when all this happened?*"

Gently but firmly the reality of God, His Love, His concern, and His compassion can be pointed out. The issue is not God's desires or unconcern, but rather the hardness of the hearts of mankind (**Matt. 19:8**), and the breaking of God's laws. Guilt must be faced when sin has occurred, and repentance must follow.

Children can be pointed to a perfect Heavenly Father who cares for them. Their fear of rejection can be handled so that the mercies of Jesus become meaningful. *Consider* **Mark 10:13-16; James 1:27; II Sam. 20:3.**

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

15. Refugees

The loss of home, familiar surroundings, culture, and religious supports leaves one with the feeling of being in a vacuum. Often even the language, form of government, sets of laws, food, and housing is strange. Such problems are part of being displaced by famine, war, politics, disasters, etc.

Often these people are separated from everyone they have known, and they must adjust to everything foreign. Usually they cannot return to their former life.

God can provide stability as He is always the same (**Mal. 3:6**), friendship (**Prov. 18:24**), love (**John 3:16**), a home (**John 14:1-6**), encouragement (**I Sam. 30:6**), etc. Many are opened to the Gospel as they have a chance to see the greatness of God and their need of Him.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

Believers who become refugees have a chance to show the reality of God's salvation to those around them. What an opportunity to tell of Jesus!

Acts of mercy and aid may open doors of opportunity. Whether in the long hours of boredom in refugee camps or the business of helping such settle into our community, the never-changing message of a compassionate Saviour who provides for His own should be offered to these while they are open. The former barriers have been stripped away, and new ones will soon come. Use the door while it is open.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

16. College Students

Certain stages of growing up have various times of openness. College students are known for evaluating their upbringing, family standards, and value system. They are establishing the foundations for their adult years. They are wanting to stand on their own feet and come to their own conclusions.

Often there is loneliness (see #6) and a searching for challenging ideas. Many are idealistic, and certainly there is no higher ideal than Jesus and the Scriptures. Some realize the emptiness of areas of modern education. They are seeking ultimate truth (**John 14:6**).

They are also choosing their field of labor for life. Many reached at this age become solid church laborers. Some become pastors and/or missionaries. What a field of opportunity!

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

Consider also students from such distances that they cannot get home for holidays. There are also students from nearly every country of the world. Even as a great start was made on world evangelism on the Day of Pentecost (**Acts 2:5-11**), so in the colleges of our nation are those who can go home to every nation. Many will be leaders and influencers of their people. What a way to do missionary work in reverse, - the field is coming to us ... sometimes from places closed to our missionaries!

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

17. Immigrants

Many of the thoughts of Refugees (#15) and College Students (#16) will also apply to those who move by choice to a new country. Here are some additional thoughts and opportunities to consider.

Like the Biblical immigrant Ruth, some come desiring that, "***Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:***" (Ruth 1:16b). Those that befriend them, like Naomi, are the most likely to reap the harvest.

Others come like the nation of Israel. When immigrating to the Promised Land, they came with a desire to stick to their religious beliefs. They also desired to take over the new country for their religion. The Scriptures record how many Israelites fell to the religious gods of the new land, even tho these gods were inferior to the true God they had known.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

Now others come to us with similar religious intentions. History records several waves of Roman Catholic immigrants. Even now, we face two waves; that is, Roman Catholic and Muslim. In the past, these attempts have been met by specific and aggressive evangelization, with good results. Why can't we reach these lost immigrants through the power of our mighty God who already is worshipped in this land?!

Opportunities arise in many ways. Assistance can be given during the settling-in time by helping to locate housing and jobs. The adjustment period leaves the door open as they will need help with learning our language, with fitting into our culture, and with solving a host of problems. This is a great time to establish a long-range friendship. Christian love opens many hearts. Some reading and listening will help you better understand their background.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

Consider some lessons taught by the Biblical accounts of immigrants such as:

- 1) Abraham and Sarah from Ur to Canaan
- 2) Jacob and family to Egypt
- 3) Joshua and Israel into Canaan
- 4) Elimelech and Naomi to Moab
- 5) Ruth to Israel
- 6) David to Philistia
- 7) Israelites to Babylon (refugees?)
- 8) Israelites with Jeremiah to Egypt
- 9) Joseph and Mary to Egypt

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

18. People in Need of Assistance

A dear brother now in glory had a real ministry of helps (**I Cor. 12:28**). He seemed to always have tracts with him. He also carried jumper cables in the trunk of his car. In cold weather he would drive and pray while looking for someone who needed help. Many distressed motorists received a smile, a start, a tract, and a word of witness. He had a number of other ways of seeking out people in need of help. Many wondered how he came up with such contacts. He looked for them! How could they refuse such willing help and a joyful witness.

A couple used to pray before going to the grocery store. One stayed in the car praying while the other went shopping ... for food and souls. What joy they had in starting conversations with sad-faced or lonely people. It seemed that the joy of the praying partner increased the longer the

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

spouse was in the store! Nearly anyone in distress, at some time buys groceries and may be approached on such neutral ground.

Add to this the opportunities of assisting with transportation, fixing homes, performing minor repairs, mowing lawns, doing odd jobs, etc. and many doors of opportunity swing open. Charles Spurgeon had a group of nurses to help the needy; a group of ladies to prepare gifts for expectant mothers and then to assist them; another group of ladies to sew clothing for the poor and needy; and a Female Servants' Home Society. Through some 66 different organizations his church maintained a vibrant evangelistic witness. At least a part of this was through the open door of "helps".

Some churches are organized and prepared to help during disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, earthquakes, fires, etc. I recently met a lady whose contact with the

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

Gospel occurred approximately 40-years earlier when a fire had destroyed her family's home. Tho only a girl at the time, she was reached by the compassion of the church people. The door of "helps" opened the opportunity, and forty years proved the permanency of results.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

19. Sufferers from Injustice

Sin has made it impossible for full justice to be given by the World. Only God is capable of dispensing complete justice.

It is common for people to be treated unfairly. Some permit this to eat at them and make them bitter. Others accept the pain and try to adjust to the circumstances.

The bitter will hurt themselves, defile others, and sin against the Holy Spirit (**Heb. 12:15; Eph. 4:30-32**). Such must learn lessons in tenderness and forgiveness (**Eph. 4:32**). Perhaps a clearer and fuller understanding of sin may help them realize the normality of injustice. Perhaps a clearer understanding of a completely just God will open them to the Gospel. Our God will one day make all things right! (**II Tim. 4:1; Acts 17:31; Psalm. 96:10; 98:9; 9:8**).

Those who accept such injustice may need

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

encouragement and/or help to adjust. Such times of vulnerability need our mercy and compassion. Christian help may open the door. They have avoided the pit of self-pity and bitterness, and now need to avoid the pit of despair and fatalism.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

20. Emotional Distress

Our present society lives so fast that emotional stress is normal. Old foundations have been abandoned, so young and old alike are vulnerable. Normal stress in itself can wear one down. Extra stress can lead to distress and eventual breakdown.

As the stress builds, satisfaction with such a life decreases. This is an opportunity to point out the old paths, the sure way, the God-given foundations for life (**Jer. 6:16; 2:13**). Here is an opening to present Jesus as the source of Peace (**John 14:27**); Life (**John 14:6**); Power, Love, and a Sound Mind (**II Tim. 1:7**). Jesus can re-build shattered emotions and minds. He even gives us His mind! (**I Cor. 2:16; Phil. 2:5**). While the world batters the emotions, Jesus saves us from the power of the world. He then enables us to overcome the world and its attacks (**I John 5:4, 5**).

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

Gentle, compassionate, prayerful contact usually finds some degree of openness. Much prayer will be needed for wisdom. Time must be kept free to listen much and speak little (**Prov. 15:2; 16:1; 18:13; 29:11**). Several careful readings of the book of Proverbs will give excellent insight on how to deal wisely.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

21. Depression

Some cases of depression are the result of emotional distress and should be spoken to as such. Many cases are not the results of stress, but rather natural cycles that God has ordained. Most depression is normal and may prove beneficial. God has built such into our natures (**James 5:17**).

There can be no mountain tops without valleys. God would use the valleys (**Psalm 23:4**) to show us the great need for Jesus to be our Shepherd (**Psalm. 23:1**).

Depressed times help us better understand the darkness of this world, our helplessness without God, our inner corruption, and the strength of sin. Depression is not sin in itself. The real issue is how an individual responds to the depression.

Those who have experienced depression can best help those who are in its grip (**II Cor. 1:4**). This is a time of openness if approached properly.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

Some Closing Thoughts

Most evangelism today is by means of personal evangelism. While some are gifted in this (**Eph. 4:11**), all believers should operate in this realm (**II Tim. 4:5**). A careful study of the Scriptures, a compassionate heart, much meditation, a strong prayer life, and a zeal for the Kingdom should prepare any Christian for this ministry.

When we look at a particular lost person, we may feel that he or she is too hardened to reach. When we look at God, we realize that He is well able to soften even the hardest soul. No sinner can avoid the Light for a lifetime. At some point it will touch them (**John 1:9**). God will challenge their darkened soul (**Rom. 1:19, 20**). God's grace will appear to them (**Titus 2:11**). This does not mean that all or even most will be saved.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

Times of Openness

God has so many ways to open them up. The preceding 21 areas are presented for your consideration. Often times, the sinner finds himself in a combination of situations. As you minister to the lost, you will find that there are other areas worthy of study. Stay alert and study the Scriptures. God will give you wisdom and understanding as you proceed.

Prayer opens up souls, for it brings God into action. God does deal with man's resisting will (**Psalm. 110:3; Phil. 2:13; 1:6; Isa. 66:8b**). We should learn to "***watch and pray***" ... watch the individual for the time and nature of opening while we pray earnestly for their souls.