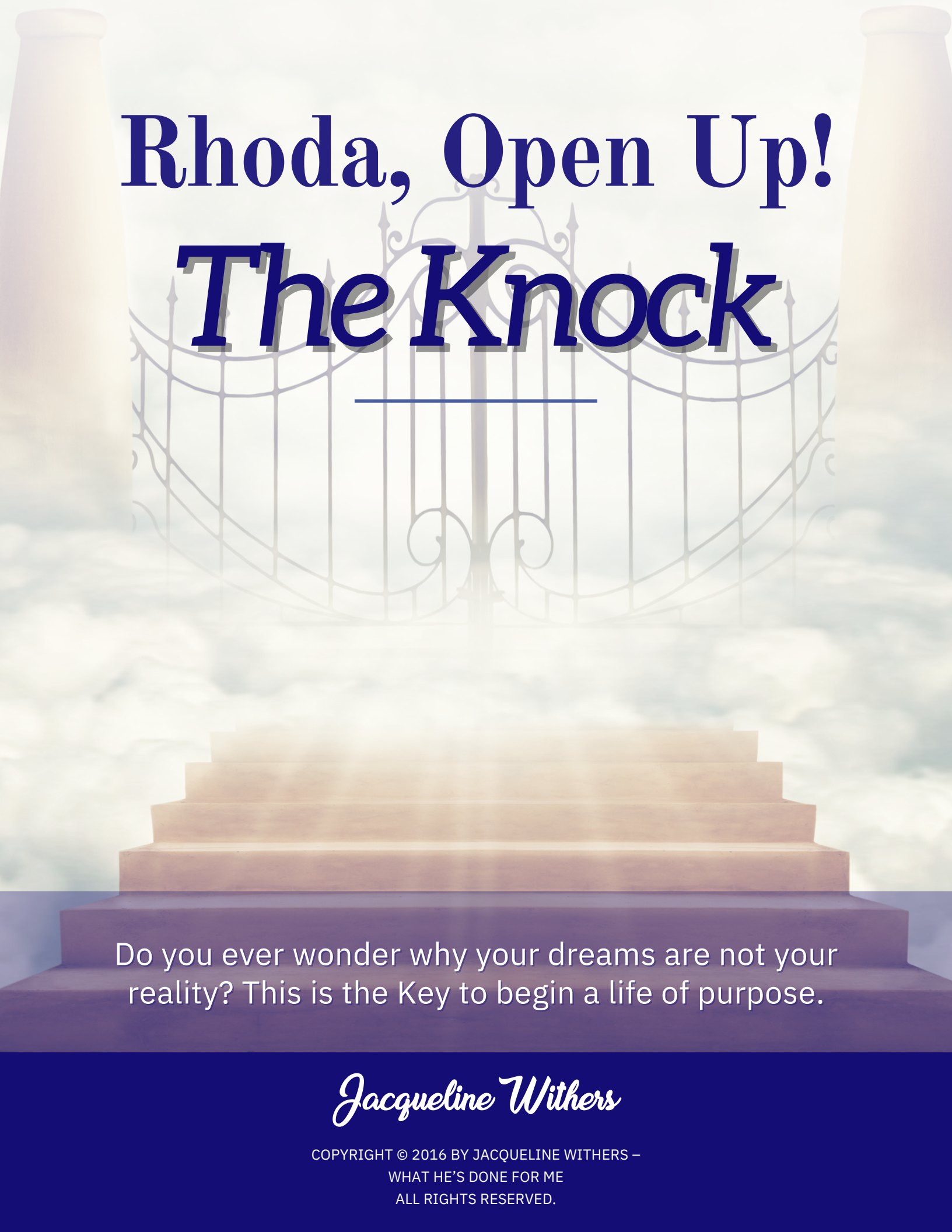




Rhoda, Open Up!

The Knock

Do you ever wonder why your dreams are not your reality? This is the Key to begin a life of purpose.

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Introduction

God speaks to us in so many ways. He speaks to us through ordinary people, such as family, friends, and even strangers. He also speaks to us through His shepherds whom He has placed over the congregations. Occasionally He'll even speak to us through a vision or a dream. Of course, the most direct way of communication is through His word, the Bible.

We know how foolish, careless, or just plain sinful we can be; nevertheless, the Omnipotent overlooks our faults and sees our need. Sometimes when we hear His voice or receive a revelation, we are so humbled. He has seen us in our poverty of spirit and showed mercy by giving us a word of encouragement.

Then there are times when God, our Father, knocks on the door of our hearts with a word that will help us trust more in Christ. Those are times when we need to see that we're not walking by faith.

Other times we're praying for instructions or direction. He always hears our prayers and is in tune with our needs. He does answer prayer. He gives us what we need to press on through our storms, or shows us a way out or in, depending on our need and situation.

How many times have you gotten so excited and couldn't wait to tell somebody that God answered your prayers? We said we weren't going to tell anybody but... We call our prayer partner, close friend, pastor or share what God has said in a testimony service. We are so filled with joy that we'll burst if we don't hurry up and tell somebody.

Praise God for His grace and mercy. Thank God for caring so much for us. We bless and praise Him for answering our prayers. Then what happens? Our emotional high will last a few days (sometimes only hours), then the feelings begin to dissipate, but no change is made. We intended to apply what we heard, but somehow never did. Instead of the word abiding in us, it's more like a topical anesthetic that soothed our pain for the moment. If we check our journals, we may find that God has spoken to us about the same situation before.

What will it take for us to actually adhere to His will? When are we going to let the word we hear change us? When are we going to apply the instructions we've been given? When are we going to open the door of our hearts and let the word have its way?

When are we going to listen? When are we going to take heed to the voice of God?



When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran and announced that Peter stood before the gate.

Acts 12:14 NKJV

Yes, like Rhoda, (our title character) we prayed and prayed. Yes, like Rhoda, we heard the voice. Like Rhoda, we even recognized the voice. However, just like Rhoda, we walked away without opening the door. We didn't open the door to our hearts and let the word in.

I know I have a folder, in my heart under the heading of "Good Intentions." This folder contains all the answered prayers I should have obeyed; things I should have done according to God's instructions. However, instead of feeling guilty I dress up my disobedience with acceptable excuses and file those things under "good intentions."

May God continue to have mercy on us. Give us ears that are wide open and hearts that are willing to trust and open; minds to retain instructions and feet to move forward.

The Knock



Acts 12:1-5, 13,14

“Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. 2 Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. 3 And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. 4 So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover. 5 Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.

13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. 14 When she recognized Peter’s voice, because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate.

The Knock

"It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John put to death with the sword. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

"So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.



Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, 'Peter is at the door!'

Acts 12:1-5, 13, 14 (NIV)



Rhoda, Open the Door!

Ah, take a moment and picture this scene. The fearful yet faithful Apostles, and others, anxiously gathered at Mary's house to pray for Peter's safety and theirs as well. The death of Stephen had caused many of "the way" to flee from the city (Acts 7:54-60). Herod Agrippa I was persecuting them to win favor with the Jews. I'm sure the news of James' death, ordered by King Herod, and now Peter's imprisonment had rattled their nerves, maybe even their faith. They did what every Christian should do in times of intense persecution – pray! They were likely in that room for several days crying out for God to deliver Peter. Their help could only come from the LORD.

Not Peter, LORD, we need him. He's our pastor, teacher, our leader, and our friend. We need his courage to strengthen us. Who else amongst us were bold enough to proclaim to a multitude of devout Jewish men that Jesus is the Christ and tell them to repent? Oh, LORD don't let them take his life too. If he's killed who will take his place? Casting lots won't help us now; we need Peter.

Herod was waiting for the feast to end so he wouldn't disrespect this holy week by killing Peter and chance turning the Jews against him. Acts 12:4 says, "...intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people." Of course, he had to wait until the people honored God before committing his murderous acts. How blind evil people are. We still see evil in the hearts of men today. People will curse you out with ashes shaped like a cross on their foreheads. Evil sitting on the seat of the heart waiting for some religious act or period to be completed is such an atrocity.

These men and women of God may have been in that room for several days, as this feast of Unleavened Bread lasted seven days. In verse 5 it says they prayed without ceasing. These were fervent prayers, crying for God to intervene. They knew their help would have to come from the Lord.

Rhoda was a servant of the house and a fellow believer. She too would have been crying out to God in prayer for Peter's release. The noise of their wails undoubtedly filled the room.

Peter, however, following instructions from an angel of the Lord, had just escaped from prison. It's likely that he knocked softly on this familiar house door. No banging on the door in the middle of the night, especially where believers secretly gathered. His knocking may have disturbed everyone's concentration for a moment, but Rhoda knew what her position was.

Yes, Rhoda loved this leader of the faith. Yes, her heart was also heavy with concern for them all. Yes, like the others she was travailing in prayer. Yet, she heard the knocking. The sound may have been heard by others, but it was her duty to answer. She was a slave of Christ and just like Onesimus, she was still a slave. It was her duty to respond to the knock.

However, there was a problem – she didn't open the door.



Rhoda, Open the Door!

We tell our children to “see who it is first” before they are allowed to open the door. Rhoda knew who it was. She had been in the presence of this great preacher and knew his voice as well as she knew her master’s voice. I can believe she had listened to Peter intently as he brought the Good News. I don’t have a doubt in my mind that she believed his message and confessed Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior. She was a servant of Mary’s, whose home she was in, and a servant of Christ.

It doesn’t say she saw Peter, but that she heard his voice. It was definitely Peter’s voice.

Now, let’s go over this again –



- She was praying for him (vs. 5 & 12),
- She heard the knock (v.13),
- She rose from prayer to answer the door (v.14),
- She recognized his voice (v.14),
- She ran to tell the others (v.14),
- She left the door closed and locked (v. 14).

While reading this scripture did you ever ask, “Gee, why didn’t she open the door and let him in? She went to answer the knock at the door. Acts 12:14 (NIV) says, “When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, ‘Peter is at the door!’” Was she so excited that she lost her mind for a moment? Really! How much greater her joy would have been if she had opened the door and been the first to receive him inside.

Did Rhoda want to kick herself; did she question herself as to why she didn’t open the door? Did she have a “Duh!” moment? What about you? Did you ever experience anything like this? I certainly have. I’ve listened to many Rhoda stories as people were honestly testifying (versus testilying) about their spiritual growth.

It is written in James 1:22 (AMP), “But prove yourselves doers of the word [actively and continually obeying God’s precepts], and not merely listeners [who hear the word but fail to internalize its meaning], deluding yourselves [by unsound reasoning contrary to the truth]. Ouch! What was Rhoda supposed to do when she heard the knock? Open the door! When we ask, seek, and knock, we want God to make haste and respond to us. Shouldn’t He expect the same of us? Why has it taken me so long to get this? Please, let me help you.

Some of you may remember the game Atari. Its creator, Nolan Bushnell, once stated, “Everyone who’s ever taken a shower has had an idea. It’s the person who gets out of the shower, dries off, and does something about it who makes a difference.” If you recognize the idea has come from God, then get out of the shower, open the door, and let Him in.

I decided to open the door to my heart to see what God has in store for me. I want to walk in the fullness of the life God has prepared for me. I want His thoughts and plans to be completed. It shall be done as long as He is in the lead.

I’m excited to see what lies ahead for me. Don’t you want to see what God has for you, too? Come on, open up. God is knocking!





Out of all the wonderful women written about in the Bible whom we're inspired by and whom we want to identify with, why do we so often identify with Rhoda? I'm sorry to say that I know I do. Oh, how many times I've prayed and been overjoyed that God responded. It's like He's knocking at the door with the answer. I couldn't wait to tell somebody and even wrote about it in my journal. Yet I didn't open the door. I didn't let what I had received into my heart. I got excited and turned back. I didn't move forward and grab ahold of the instructions. I didn't seize the blessing, I only rejoiced in it for a few vain moments.

God so often opens His hand to give to us, but we don't take. Imagine this – the Israelites praying for deliverance from the Egyptians. God answers and Moses responds to the knock. He tells his wife and goes forth into Egypt to confront the Pharaoh. His first steps keep him moving forward, but the others who had been praying want to go back. Oh, wait – this is what happened. They didn't want to open the door and grab the prize. This resulted in many of them dying in wilderness.

Don't go backward when you hear the knock. I'm not the only one who has done this. I've heard many stories of others who have done the same. What's your story? We've all had them.

James 1:19 (NKJV) reads, "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear", and he goes on to say in verse 22, "But be ye doers of the word and not hearers only."

What was Rhoda supposed to do when she heard the knock? Open the door! Mark 4:24 tells us to take heed of what we hear for if we don't, we'll lose the ability to hear. Why be able to hear if you are never going to listen? Listening is an action word.

Aren't you ready for a change? Knock, knock, knock!