

When Opportunity Knocks

By
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Introduction and Overview of This Study

Lesson 1

Knock. Knock. Just about everyone in America has experienced it. Coming to the door, we peak out and see two neatly dressed but unknown persons standing on our front porch. Of course their arrival is at the worst time. Dinner is cooking. We're on the telephone. Our favorite television program is about to come on. We're about to walk out the door to run an errand. We may worry about what to say, may not be interested in what they want to discuss, and dread having to tell them we are not interested. What do you do? Do you let them in? Do you send them on their way? Most likely the majority of us have done both, depending on the situation and the amount of time we have.

An article published in 2005 noted that today Mormons have over 70,000 young people out and about across the world serving as door-to-door missionaries. Jehovah's Witnesses have over 90,000 persons actively engaged in door-to-door recruiting (Campos, 2005). Those in the Mormon Church are encouraged to give two years of their time to go door-to-door spreading their religion inside their local community. These are usually young people who are just entering or are in the middle of their college pursuit. A recent survey found that 64% of all Mormons feel they have a personal responsibility to share their faith with others (The Barna Group, 2008).

Jehovah's Witnesses are very organized in their door-to-door methods and approach. They employ full-time persons known as "kingdom publishers" who are required to spend as much time as possible teaching people door-to-door. Others are only part-time, called "pioneer publishers" who are required to do 100+ hours per month door knocking. Each Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses has a territory that it is expected to evangelize. Each publisher has an assigned neighborhood. Statistics are kept and reported to the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society. The Witnesses base their evangelism on the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. They also quote Luke 8:1 and Acts 20:20 as proof of the need for door-to-door evangelism. One publication states that they are different than other religions in that they expect everyone who is a Witness to go door-to-door, not just a group of missionaries or preachers (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 2003).

Not everyone always receives the Witnesses or Mormons in a friendly manner. In 1998, the small town of Stratton, Ohio, passed an ordinance requiring canvassers to get permission from the Mayor's office before approaching homes door-to-door. Persons in the town felt they were being overwhelmed by numbers of Jehovah's Witnesses who sought to evangelize the town. The city council claimed it passed the ordinance to protect security and to prevent homeowners from being annoyed by the constant visits of religious teachers. The Jehovah's Witnesses promptly filed a lawsuit that went all the way to the United States Supreme Court. They felt the ordinance violated the First Amendment to the Constitution. They won by an 8-1 decision (Associated Press, 2002).

Door Knockers Can Present Christians with an Opportunity

In my experience, material on answering Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses usually falls into two extremes. The material is either too generalized and presents a broad summary of each religion, without getting into various doctrinal points, or it is too comprehensive and detailed, requiring the Bible student to search through page after page of information. This study is intended to be somewhere in between these extremes. I wish to present an overview of several doctrinal tenets of each religion, equipping the Christian with adequate answers to claims made by our Jehovah's Witness and Mormon friends.

A Study of the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons

At first thought it may seem to us that every religious person who appears on our front porch would be a lost cause to be converted from the religion they represent. And yes, most likely the person wishing to initiate a discussion with you has received multiple hours of training—not only in doctrine but also in answering almost any possible argument you may project. But even if the odds are against us, this is not a time to slam the door in someone's face or a time to be intimidated. It can be a great opportunity to teach. Too many refuse to study with Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses. They have no idea as to what these religious groups believe and really do not possess the care to investigate. The Barna Group has written, "Sadly, most Americans react on an emotional level rather than from a worldview that is based on thoughtful convictions. Perhaps having a Mormon or Jehovah's Witness ringing our doorbell and pushing us to explain or defend our beliefs could be a catalyst for an even deeper process of discovery—especially if we enter the conversation knowing that we probably have some substantial disagreements on core elements of faith" (The Barna Group, 2008).

Even though our efforts may appear fruitless at the time of teaching/discussion, we still have a responsibility to sow the seeds of the New Testament gospel. We have no idea if the person we are studying with has had certain doubts about their religion. Our words, conduct, and attitude have the potential to go far in influencing someone. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses are very dedicated to their religious beliefs. But some struggle with questions they cannot answer. Others feel isolated, lonely, empty, and long for something else. It could be that God could use you as a tool to help draw them closer to His gospel. This must always be upon the mind of the Christian. Paul wrote, "What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth," 1 Corinthians 3:5-6 NASU. Just like Paul and Apollos, we are servants of God. Our job is to adequately show God's way, and it is up to the person we study with to accept or reject. By refusing to slam the door, we may very well plant small seeds that later may sprout during a season of doubt or nagging questions that the person cannot answer.

When we answer the door, we need to possess a godly demeanor and carefully choose the words we speak. Paul had this in mind when conversing with those outside of the gospel: "praying...that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ,...that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak. Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person," Colossians 4:3-6 NASU. We must be patient and warm. Being argumentative and combative is not always the answer. Usually it turns into a detriment and decreases future opportunities to hold a Bible study. Remember, we may only get one chance to help the person(s) we are studying with to see a true picture of Christianity.

Door Knocking in the 21st Century

We have all heard of tremendous success stories in years past with evangelistic door knocking efforts. But it does seem that over the last decade or two things have changed. American culture has moved in a different direction. Violence in society and the general suspicion of someone knocking at your door have also led to a decrease in effectiveness in door knocking. Not only do people dislike someone knocking on their door, they seem to resent it. Most Americans view their home as a nest where they can disconnect from the world, and upon their arrival there they simply do not want to be bothered. It does appear that cold call door knocking efforts contribute to more discouragement than excitement. Lon Allison says cold call evangelism is "like a cannon. If shot in the right place, it does great things, but in the wrong place it can be devastating" (Hertz, 2002).

When Opportunity Knocks...

But all is not lost. Timothy K. Beougher, who is affiliated with Southern Seminary says, “There’s no question there has been a decline, but as Twain said, the reports of its death are greatly exaggerated” (Hertz, 2002). The places where door knocking seems to be most effective is with recent visitors to church, friends of members (referrals), and struggling members who do not attend services often. Some also suggest speaking with persons outside the home...such as at a coffee shop, library, or other public places. Congregations who engage in door knocking evangelism must be careful not to use it as their only source of generating contacts, provide proper training, and follow through on the commitment. It is no small endeavor.

I hope you are excited about our study into Mormon and Jehovah’s Witness doctrine. There are certainly more comprehensive works dedicated to exposing the error of both religions. And there are more generalized tracts and pamphlets that do an adequate job of summarizing the basic history and teachings. As we go through this study, you will be presented with a brief history of each major component of doctrine and ways to answer these doctrines from the New Testament. The charts that go along with each lesson will be especially helpful to the student. Please take the time to read and study each lesson. Be prepared for each class and you will be amazed at how much you can learn about these two religions!

Matching

- | | |
|--|---------------------------|
| 1. The number of Mormons who feel they have a personal responsibility to share their faith with others. | 2 |
| 2. Full-time employees of the Watchtower Society who spend as much time as possible teaching door-to-door. | Stratton, OH |
| 3. The number of hours pioneer publishers must spend in door-to-door teaching. | 90,000 |
| 4. The number of years some young Mormons dedicate their lives to mission work. | 64 |
| 5. The number of Mormons actively involved in mission work and/or door-to-door evangelism. | 100+ |
| 6. Town that briefly outlawed door knockers from canvassing homes inside their corporate limits. | Luke 8:1 |
| 7. Passage that Jehovah’s Witnesses use to justify door-to-door evangelism. | Kingdom Publishers |
| 8. The number of Jehovah’s Witnesses actively involved in door-to-door evangelism. | 70,000 |

Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever had a Jehovah’s Witness or Mormon knock on your door? What was your first reaction? Briefly describe your experience with them.

A Study of the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons

2. Have you studied Jehovah's Witness or Mormon doctrine before?
3. Do you presently feel you could hold a knowledgeable discussion with someone on what these two religions teach?
4. What do you think has led to the apathy in Americans to discuss or investigate religious differences?
5. In what ways does our attitude play a role in studying with Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons?
6. What is our job in evangelistic efforts? Cite Scripture to prove your answer.
7. What do argumentative and combative attitudes usually lead to?
8. Do you believe door-to-door evangelism in America is as effective as it once was?
9. What are some things that can help door-to-door evangelism become more effective as we go throughout the 21st century?
10. How do you think this series of lessons will help you in your spiritual pursuit?
11. What are some goals you have for this study?

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