

Back Doors, Our Work and Mercy

Preface: A Note To The Reader

This is an abridged version of the full article. Some of the content of the full article is only for people in the Thursday group. If you're in the group and you haven't read the full article, let me know and I'll send it to you.

Not Being Able To Go Forward With What We're Carrying

I remember Charles, my teacher, saying to me: "Phil you can't go forward with the stuff you're carrying." Charles knew that whatever I was carrying in me would stop me from going forward.

Some people in the Thursday group are at this same point. They cannot go significantly forward with the 'stuff' that they're carrying. They also cannot go significantly forward by continuing to actively engage in specific de-serving behaviors. *A de-serving behavior is something that we do or think that doesn't serve who we really are; that doesn't serve us living as an image of God. An addiction is when we repeatedly and compulsively engage in de-serving behavior(s).*

Last week two people in the group were told that their repeated de-serving behaviors need to change for them to continue in the group. The de-serving behavior is greatly slowing them going forward. Yes, they can become better people and still do their de-serving behavior, though their de-serving behavior is keeping them in a caterpillar life.¹ Like a dimmer switch turned down on a light bulb, they'll not be able to be fully bright as long as they continue with their behavior.

Back Doors²

Each of us have *our back doors – our ways that we escape, comfort, distract and numb ourselves from being with what is.* We use our back doors when we feel uncomfortable. The world offers many, many back doors; everything from exercise to ecstasy (the drug) to excess of all kinds including food, hobbies, entertainment, sex, reading, watching TV or the internet. We use our back doors, our ways of escape, when 'we're at our weakest.' Back doors have different degrees of shame or different degrees of justification with them.

Each of us uses back doors to leave the present moment. Here are two questions about back doors:

1. How often do you go through the back door? Stated differently: How often do you use ways of escaping, comforting, distracting and numbing yourself from being present with what is?
2. How big is your back door? Is it the two tablespoons of ice cream before you go to bed (a very small back door) or is it a daily substance, attention and/or activity de-serving behavior that takes a lot of your energy and dilutes your natural presence (a large back door)?

I don't advocate a 'no back door' policy. Cut yourself a little slack. Have your two tablespoons of ice cream. Be kind and be gentle to yourself. You've probably spent a life of running out through your back doors; of not being in the present moment; especially as the present moment becomes more and more uncomfortable.

To go from big, gaping back doors that we run through many times a day to smaller, more innocent ways of escape that we do less often is progress. This is staying more present to the present moment.

Substance-Driven Back Doors

Drugs, alcohol and food are three big substance-driven back doors. Each of these back doors has a direct effect on our body, on our mind and on our emotions. Each de-serves us in a big way. Drugs and alcohol also distort our mind's perception in big ways; whether the distortion be in grandiose ways or in limiting, fearful and even paranoid ways.

Attention-Driven Back Doors

Listening to our mind and numbing our mind are two big attention-driven back doors.

Listening To Our Mind

One of the main functions of our mind is to keep making thought after thought after thought from the moment we wake up until we go to sleep. When we say we want more peace in our life, we're often referring to our mind being more quiet. The mind produces thoughts all day long. Just because our mind is producing thoughts all day long doesn't mean that we have to listen to the thoughts.

Some thoughts are very helpful. What streets do I want to drive on to get to Bill's house? What am I going to make for dinner? Some thoughts are needed and good. Most of our thoughts, if we pay attention, throughout the day are not needed. Most thoughts are just re-thinking many different past or future events or playing what-if games with ourselves.

The heart pumps blood, the mind pumps thoughts. There is nothing wrong with a stream of thought throughout the day. We don't have to try to stop our mind from thinking. *If we don't pay attention to the thoughts that are not needed, they will, by themselves, begin to become less frequent, and these unneeded thoughts will tend to stay around less long; just as an ignored guest in our house will leave much sooner than a guest that we give our attention to.*

Numbing Our Mind

There are many ways to numb our mind by putting our attention on something other than what we're feeling in the present moment. Some ways that people numb their mind are through reading, TV (video cable or satellite TV, Netflix, movies and video games), the internet (email, web browsing, facebook, youtube), music or anything else that repeatedly prevents our attention from staying with what is in the present moment.

Each of the above mentioned ways of numbing our mind can also be a neutral or positive activity for us. The question is: Are we doing these activities to numb ourselves or are we simply doing these activities?

Activity-Driven Back Doors

Exercise, keeping busy and sex (including pornography) are three big activity-driven back doors.

Each of the above mentioned activities of exercise, doing things that need to be done (rather than keeping busy to escape the present moment and escape our present feelings) and sex can be positive activities for us. The question is: Are we doing these activities to escape the present moment and what we're feeling, or are we simply doing these activities?

Back Doors, Will and Mercy

Some back doors are really, really big and they've been used daily or frequently for a long time. These big and long-used back doors can be hard to stop going through. *Not going through a back door means that we stay present; that we don't numb, run away, fight against, deny or distract ourselves from what we're feeling and from what is in the present moment. It's always uncomfortable feelings that will want us to run to, and through, our back doors.*

I don't know anyone who thinks that they've stopped running through a very big, gaping back door only through their will. My feeling is that God waits for us to show our desire to stop going through the back door; to stop running away from the present moment before S/He gives us a very big helping portion of Mercy. S/He waits for a prompt from us; like an actor waiting off stage until the cue comes for her to go on stage.

More About Back Doors

Recently two people in the Thursday group became very vulnerable and exposed their big back doors.³ Back doors have shame attached to them. It's not easy for a person to be vulnerable and reveal their most shameful behavior.

This confessing of back doors began with two people and it has spread to more people in the group stepping up about their back doors. This type of contagiousness is what makes everyone in the group progress faster. As one person opens, it makes it easier for other people to open. We are more powerful together than being by ourselves.

What seems like short term stress relief – running through our back doors through compulsive and repeated actions or thoughts – actually builds more long term stress. Life is so much more complicated and stressful when we avoid, numb, escape, fight or loathe what, simply, we're feeling.

Life is much easier by not choosing to run through our back doors. This feeling of relief is echoed by everyone I've talked to that gets to the other side of wanting to run, hide or fight what we're currently feeling.

In the beginning, staying present, rather than de-serving ourselves, can be hard. In the long term, happiness comes quicker by staying with what is and also by being gentle with ourselves as we feel what is uncomfortable.

Coming To The End Of Our Ability

We're in the habit of using our back doors; whether we want to or not. There comes a point when we know that our desire and our will to stop fleeing through our back door isn't working. We've done all we can do with desire and will, and we've fallen short. At this point we're still running through our back doors. We've exhausted our capacity to change our behavior.

Mercy As A Form Of Grace

Grace is a big concept; especially when we connect Grace to God's Grace. This article explores back doors, our work (our effort and our attention) and how Mercy can help us not slip out the back door. Mercy is defined as *a relieving or welcoming occurrence*. God's Mercy is a relieving or welcoming occurrence from a Higher Power.

Opening To Mercy

We can cry out: "Oh God, help me!" Many people do cry out for Mercy, for Help. Some receive the Mercy and change their de-serving behavior, while others continue in their back door way of living.

If crying out doesn't fully work, then we can take active steps beyond our crying out for Mercy. Two active steps that we can take are to stay with what is and trust. These two efforts can help Mercy enter. (There are other efforts that invite Mercy to go deep within).

Staying With What Is

Staying with what is is going to be uncomfortable; probably very uncomfortable. Staying with what is means not to run away from, not to confront, not to numb and not to distract whatever it is that we're feeling.

We've spent our life going through our back doors time and time again. Staying with what is takes courage. We decide to stay with what, in the past, we've run away from. The courage to stay present opens us even more to Mercy. Courage grows as we live in a way of true service to ourselves; as we stay present and not run out the back door.

Trust

Trust builds over time. The more times we get through feeling very uncomfortable without escaping, the more trust builds that we can get through the next time of being very uncomfortable without escaping. We gradually relax more and more; both in the easy times and in the difficult times. Over time, we become more comfortable with less effort.

Life Becomes Easier

Life is much easier and more simple by staying more present with whatever comes up rather than running away, hiding, denying and covering over our current feelings. Life won't always be easy, though life will be easier than it was.

By staying with what is and trusting, we shift to a new way of living. Instead of compulsively de-serving ourselves and relying only on our will and our mind, we begin to have more access to a Higher Power. This Higher Power can guide us infinitely better than our mind and will.⁴

As we stay with what is, be gentle with ourselves, and trust, then new ways can open to us; new ideas and new solutions appear. As we stay more present and trust, our big gaping back doors become smaller and smaller, and they become less and less used.

As our running through our back doors becomes more infrequent, our former de-serving behavior greatly lessens. We save so much previously wasted energy by staying present and by not running through our back doors. We're now living more as who we really are. This brings more ease and invites Mercy into our life.

May all beings live as peace, love and joy.

Footnotes:

- 1 The article [Caterpillar and Butterfly](#) explains what a caterpillar life is.
- 2 I first heard the term 'back door' from [Racquel Palmese](#); one of my teacher's senior and top students, and a teacher herself. A strong reaction came up in me each time Racquel addressed back doors. The reaction was because I had a big, gaping, and often used back door, and that back door was being threatened.
- 3 These two people are not the people who were told last week that they'd need to change their de-serving behavior in order to stay in the group.
- 4 If the reader wants more insight into these two different ways of living, please read the article [Caterpillar and Butterfly](#).