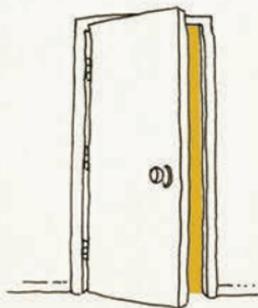


New York Times
bestselling author of
Dinner with a Perfect Stranger

Open

GET READY
FOR THE ADVENTURE
OF A LIFETIME



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Open: Get Ready for the Adventure of a Lifetime

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ONE

IT WASN'T THE END of the world. It was only the end of *my* world.

My girlfriends all said the usual things:

“You’ll be better off without him.”

“There are more fish in the sea.”

“He doesn’t know what he’s passing up.”

My journal recorded all the usual pep talk:

“I’ll learn from this and become a better person.”

“I wasn’t ready to get married yet anyway.”

“This will give me a chance to focus on my career.”

I wasn’t buying any of it. The truth was, I had made a huge mistake. I’d broken up with the best guy I’d

ever met. Jason and I had been together for almost two years. My whole future was tied to him. Or so I thought—until he came to my North Dallas apartment one evening after a third job interview with the same company, full of excitement.

“Well?” I asked as I opened the door.

Jason took me into his arms and kissed me passionately. “I accepted the position!”

“You did!” I kissed him back. “That’s fantastic! When do you start?”

“Next week.”

“Wow. That’s quick. At which office—downtown or Galleria?”

Jason took a deep breath and sat down on the couch. “Well, neither.”

I kept standing. “What do you mean, neither?”

“They want me to go through their management training program.”

“Which is where?”

“Atlanta.”

I dreaded asking the next question. “For how long?”

He hesitated. “A year.”

* * *

Jason moved to Atlanta. We called each other. We e-mailed. We skyped. And after three months, we broke up.

I was the one who did it. I was always the one who did it, breaking up. I just never thought I'd do it with Jason. If I had to explain it, I'd say I never got over the feeling that I was second place to Jason's career aspirations. I knew his career was important. But couldn't he pursue a career within driving distance of me? If I had been the most important thing in his life, he wouldn't have moved away for a year. I couldn't shake that feeling, no matter how often I told myself it wasn't forever.

So on a fateful Friday night, facing another lonely weekend, I called him and said straight out, "Jason, I can't do this anymore. It's over."

He didn't have much of a reaction. That should have told me something. He certainly didn't plead with me to reconsider.

I lasted two weeks without him. No phone calls. No e-mails. No skyping. And I was miserable. Wherever I fell in Jason's priorities, I missed him horribly. I finally swallowed enough of my pride to call.

"Hey, it's me."

"Hey. I'm surprised you called." His tone seemed distant. Not that I could blame him.

"Yeah. Well . . ." I took a deep breath. "Jason, I made a big mistake. I was being emotional. I was feeling rejected, like I wasn't important to you anymore. But I love you, and I know you love me, and I think we

can make this work out. I'll move to Atlanta if I need to—get a job doing whatever.”

There was silence on the other end.

“Jason?”

“Yeah.”

“Did you hear what I said?”

“Yeah.”

“What do you think?”

He didn't respond. A knot formed in my stomach.

“Jason, I'm sorry—”

“Emma . . .”

“What?”

“I met someone at work.”

* * *

A month later, I opened my apartment door just after six on a Friday night, changed out of my work clothes, turned on the TV, and looked through what was on. News. Sports. The *17 Again* movie. *I wish I was seventeen again*, I thought. *And I'm only twenty-nine*.

I kept looking. Kids' programming. *Wheel of Fortune*. *Property Brothers*. I settled for *Property Brothers*.

That pretty much summed up my life—*settling*. Instead of pursuing better jobs elsewhere, as Jason had, I had settled for a mediocre job just to be close to him. Instead of remaining near my social group, I had settled for a new apartment close to work but an hour

away from all my friends. Instead of staying at the great church I had attended for ten years near my old place, I had settled for a church down the street where I didn't know anyone. I had settled for a life unlike everything I had expected even six months before, and I felt like I was going nowhere.

I reached over to the end table next to the couch and picked up my Bible. I'd been reading it more frequently since Jason and I broke up. Not that I never read it before that, but I'd mostly let my relationship with God coast during my time with Jason. I went to church, participated in the career group, listened to Christian radio in the car, and tried to catch time for praying and Bible reading when I could, but I didn't spend much time alone with God. Now, I had all the time in the world for him.

My real question was, did he have time for me? Because, to be honest, I wasn't feeling him all that much. The Bible was supposed to guide me. Comfort me. Reassure me. Wasn't it? But as I opened it for the umpteenth time since Jason and I broke up, my expectations couldn't have been lower.

God, I found myself praying—or thinking, at least; I'm not sure it was officially a prayer—I don't feel like I'm getting anything at all from the Bible. What good is reading these stories from the Gospels? None of them has anything to do with what I'm dealing with right now.

God was supposed to satisfy me. Isn't that what all the Christian music said, or implied? And that's what I'd been told over and over by every youth pastor, college pastor, normal pastor, abnormal pastor, whatever—let God himself satisfy you.

The only problem was, sitting on my couch alone, reading stories in the Gospel of John that I'd read a thousand (okay, numerous) times, it just wasn't true. Jesus *wasn't* enough. The Bible *didn't* provide the answers I needed. I hated to admit it, but it felt like my only real fulfillment was in the past. He'd moved to Georgia four months before.

But it wasn't just my lack of fulfillment that concerned me. For the first time since high school, I found little doubts about my faith starting to creep into my mind. At first I dismissed them. *Everyone has doubts from time to time*, I told myself. But the thoughts kept reappearing, troubling me. "You can't judge God's existence based on the circumstances of your life," I had heard at church. But that was all I had to go on. All my life I had been taught about God's goodness and love. But where was his love when something happened that really mattered?

To be honest, these thoughts frightened me. I had never been one to doubt my faith. What if I couldn't shake them? I didn't want to live the rest of my life not even knowing whether God existed.

I sighed deeply, put my Bible on the coffee table, and grabbed an ice cream sandwich from the freezer. I walked out of my apartment to the mailboxes. Maybe there'd be an interesting insurance company letter in my box. I pulled out my mail and glanced at it. A pile of ads. A dental office coupon that looked like a credit card. An oil change coupon. An insurance letter (I was right!). Two letters that looked like credit card applications. And a greeting card with my name and address handwritten on the envelope. *Huh*. Despite my momentary hope, the handwriting wasn't Jason's. And it didn't have a return address. On the back of the envelope was written one word in ornate lettering: *Open*.

I wanted to open it right away, but it would have been awkward with my ice cream sandwich, so I walked back to the apartment and put everything down first.

Who could have sent me a greeting card? I tore open the envelope. On the front of the card was a picture of a sunrise shining through a tree with words I recognized:

“And now these three remain: faith, hope
and love.”

I CORINTHIANS 13:13

Someone was sending me spiritual encouragement. That was nice. I opened the card to see who had sent

it. On the inside I found handwriting that matched the envelope. It said simply:

For a real adventure with Jesus, go through the nearest open door.

No signature. No name at all.

For a real adventure with Jesus. What did that mean? Who in the world would have written me such a mysterious note?

I glanced at the envelope again. No further clues. I looked over the card again. Nothing. A friend must have sent it, although I couldn't imagine who.

The odd thing—and all of this was odd, really—was that the sender was encouraging me to walk through the nearest open door. What did that refer to? I thought about it. What were the doors God had opened in my life right now? I picked up a pen from the table and started a list on the back of the envelope.

Interview at accounting firm

After taking my current job, I'd been asked back for a second interview at an accounting firm in town. I'd declined it, but they left the door open, saying they'd like to talk if I changed my mind. The job I'd taken

wasn't turning out all that great. Maybe going for a second interview wasn't a bad idea.

Fall mission trip

The career group at my new church was taking a short-term mission trip to Honduras in the fall. I'd have to ask for vacation time I hadn't officially earned yet, but maybe going on the trip would be good for me. It would be a good way to get to know people in the group better. And mission trips were supposed to be life changing. *I could use some positive life change at this point.*

Michael

A guy at church had asked me out. I'd told him no. The last thing I needed was to jump into another relationship. But maybe I was wrong. Maybe moving on was exactly what I needed.

That was about it—all the open doors I was aware of. Except my friend Allison had invited me to move in with her. Did moving back across town constitute an open door? And did I want to commute to work an hour each way just so I could be closer to my friends? I jotted it down anyway, just in case.

Allison's apartment

I looked at the note again.

For a real adventure with Jesus, go through the nearest open door.

An adventure with Jesus. Did that mean the mission trip? That was the most Jesus-oriented door in front of me. Maybe God would direct me—although, to be honest, I was never really sure about his direction in anything.

I wandered back to the living room and glanced at my Bible by the couch. Maybe that was the open door: spending more time with Jesus in his Word. That's what Christians are supposed to do, isn't it? I sat on the couch and opened the Bible again, this time to somewhere in the Gospel of Mark. I started reading:

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping

on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”

He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

The story was great, miraculous. But how in the world were these Bible stories in any way relevant to my life in the twenty-first century?

I stood up and walked to the bookcase. Maybe there was something here I could actually get into. The Narnia series. I’d loved those when I was younger. Maybe I’d enjoy reading them again. A bunch of books on Christian living. A lot of good *those* had done me. Several interior design books my folks had given me back when I had thought about changing my major. One of them caught my eye: *Doors*. It was a coffee-table book, almost too big for the bookcase. It was about . . . doors. All kinds of doors. Large. Small. Fancy. Plain. Ancient. Newly made. Not the most practical book, but I liked it. I liked the idea of doors, opening to new rooms, new houses, new possibilities.

And then a silly thought struck me. What if the greeting card was referring to a literal door? What if I was literally supposed to walk through the open door closest to me?

I did a quick glance around the apartment. The closest door led to my bedroom. And it was open. Feeling utterly ridiculous, I walked through it. On the other side, I discovered . . . my unmade bed, clothes on the floor, and two boxes of books I'd never unpacked.

Well, so much for walking through a literal doorway. I glanced at the clock. 6:23. It was still early enough to go out and do something. Maybe go to a movie. I think I even had a box of candy in the pantry to take with me. I walked toward the pantry door, which stood slightly ajar. Then I realized I'd been mistaken. When I opened the card, my bedroom door wasn't the closest open door. The pantry door was.

I instinctively glanced around me to make sure no one was watching. I pushed the pantry door wide open. The pantry wasn't exactly big, but I could actually step inside if I wanted to. Maybe my next adventure with Jesus involved the Cheez-Its on the shelf to the left. I stepped through the pantry doorway.

That's when the first wave smacked me in the face.