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Forward

One secret of effective witnessing is to recognize opportunities to relate God to the other person's experience. When the opportunity arises, we must have the courage to speak.

Don't let the fear of what might happen cause you to miss an opportunity. Be alert for the opportunities God gives you, and take full advantage of them.

Our most important opportunities may come when we least expect them. Joseph was brought hastily from the dungeon and pushed before Pharaoh. Did he have time to prepare? Yes and no.

He had no warning that he would be suddenly pulled from prison and questioned by the king. Yet Joseph was ready for almost anything because of his right relationship with God.

God's love is constant and patient and welcoming. He will search for us and give us opportunities to respond, but he will not force us to come to him. Like the father in this story, God waits patiently for us to come to our senses.

When Paul became a servant of the gospel, God gave him the ability to share effectively the gospel of Christ. You may not be an apostle or even an evangelist, but God will give you opportunities to tell others about Christ.

And with the opportunities he will provide the ability, courage, and power. Whenever an opportunity presents itself, make yourself available to God as his servant. As you focus on the other person and his or her needs, God will communicate your caring attitude. Your words will be natural, loving, and compelling.

Chapter 1



Speak up for God when opportunities come.

Genesis 40:8

And they replied, "We both had dreams last night, but there is no one here to tell us what they mean."

"Interpreting dreams is God's business," Joseph replied. "Tell me what you saw."

When the subject of dreams came up, Joseph focused everyone's attention on God. Rather than using the situation to make himself look good, he turned it into a powerful witness for the Lord.

One secret of effective witnessing is to recognize opportunities to relate God to the other person's experience. When the opportunity arises, we must have the courage to speak, as Joseph did.

Stay ready for opportunities

Genesis 40:23

Pharaoh's cupbearer, however, promptly forgot all about Joseph, never giving him another thought.

When Pharaoh's cupbearer was freed from prison, he forgot about Joseph, even though he had Joseph to thank for his freedom. It was two full years before Joseph had another opportunity to be freed (Genesis 41:1). Yet Joseph's faith was deep, and he would be ready when the next chance came. When we feel passed by, overlooked, or forgotten, we shouldn't be surprised that people are often ungrateful. In similar situations, trust God as Joseph did. More opportunities may be waiting.

Opportunities may come when you least expect them.

Genesis 41:14

Pharaoh sent for Joseph at once, and he was brought hastily from the dungeon. After a quick shave and change of clothes, he went in and stood in Pharaoh's presence.

Our most important opportunities may come when we least expect them. Joseph was brought hastily from the dungeon and pushed before Pharaoh. Did he have time to prepare? Yes and no.

He had no warning that he would be suddenly pulled from prison and questioned by the king. Yet Joseph was ready for almost anything because of his right relationship with God.

It was not Joseph's knowledge of dreams that helped him interpret their meaning. It was his knowledge of God.

Be ready for opportunities by getting to know more about God. Then you will be ready to call on him when opportunities come your way.

Don't let fear keep you from your opportunities

Exodus 2:7-8

Then the baby's sister approached the princess. "Should I go and find one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?" she asked.

"Yes, do!" the princess replied. So the girl rushed home and called the baby's mother.

Miriam, the baby's sister, saw that Pharaoh's daughter had discovered Moses. Quickly she took the initiative to suggest a nurse (her mother) who might care for the baby.

The Bible doesn't say if Miriam was afraid to approach the Egyptian princess, or if the princess was suspicious of the Hebrew girl. But Miriam did approach her, and the princess bought the services of Miriam and her mother.

Their family was reunited. Special opportunities may come our way unexpectedly. Don't let the fear of what might happen cause you to miss an opportunity. Be alert for the opportunities God gives you, and take full advantage of them.

Look for opportunities to use your gifts.

Exodus 38:21

Here is an inventory of the materials used in building the Tabernacle of the Covenant. Moses directed the Levites to compile the figures, and Ithamar son of Aaron the priest served as recorder.

In building the tabernacle, Moses laid out the steps, but Ithamar supervised the project. We all have different talents and abilities. God didn't ask Moses to build the tabernacle but to motivate the experts to do it. Look for the areas where God has gifted you and then seek opportunities to allow God to use your gifts.

How to evaluate opportunities

Numbers 13:17-20

Moses gave the men these instructions as he sent them out to explore the land: "Go northward through the Negev into the hill country. [18] See what the land is like and find out whether the people living there are strong or weak, few or many.

What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? Do their towns have walls or are they unprotected?

How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there many trees? Enter the land boldly, and bring back samples of the crops you see." (It happened to be the season for harvesting the first ripe grapes.)

Moses decided what information was needed before the people could enter the Promised Land, and he took careful steps to get that information. When you are making decisions or assuming new responsibilities, remember these two important steps. Ask yourself what you need to know about the opportunity, and then obtain that knowledge. Common sense is a valuable aid in accomplishing God's purposes.

Increased opportunity brings increased responsibility.

Numbers 14:20-23

Then the Lord said, "I will pardon them as you have requested. But as surely as I live, and as surely as the earth is filled with the Lord's glory, not one of these people will ever enter that land.

They have seen my glorious presence and the miraculous signs I performed both in Egypt and in the wilderness, but again and again they tested me by refusing to listen.

They will never even see the land I swore to give their ancestors. None of those who have treated me with contempt will enter it.

Not every opportunity is sent from God.

1 Samuel 23:7

Saul soon learned that David was at Keilah. "Good!" he exclaimed. "We've got him now! God has handed him over to me, for he has trapped himself in a walled city!"

When Saul heard that David was trapped in a walled town (one with gates and bars), he thought God was putting David at his mercy.

Saul wanted to kill David so badly that he would have interpreted any sign as God's approval to move ahead with his plan. Had Saul known God better, he would have known what God wanted and would not have misread the situation as God's approval for murder.

Not every opportunity is sent from God. We may want something so much that we assume any opportunity to obtain it is of divine origin.

As we see from Saul's case, however, this may not be true. An opportunity to do something against God's will can never be from God because God does not tempt us. When opportunities come your way, double-check your motives.

Make sure you are following God's desires, and not just your own.

Chapter 2



God gave Judah many opportunities to repent.

2 Kings 25:1

So on January 15, during the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon led his entire army against Jerusalem. They surrounded the city and built siege ramps against its walls.

Look for opportunities to volunteer.

Ezra 8:15

I assembled the exiles at the Ahava Canal, and we camped there for three days while I went over the lists of the people and the priests who had arrived. I found that not one Levite had volunteered to come along.

You may get only one opportunity to follow Jesus.

Matthew 10:14

If a village doesn't welcome you or listen to you, shake off the dust of that place from your feet as you leave.

Why did Jesus tell his disciples to shake the dust off their feet if a city or home didn't welcome them? When leaving Gentile cities, pious Jews often shook the dust from their feet to show their separation from Gentile practices.

If the disciples shook the dust of a *Jewish* town from their feet, it would show their separation from Jews who rejected their Messiah.

This gesture was to show the people that they were making a wrong choice—that the opportunity to choose Christ might not present itself again. Are you receptive to teaching from God? If you ignore the Spirit's prompting, you may not get another chance.

God gives us opportunities to turn to him.

Luke 15:20

"So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.

In the two preceding stories, the seeker actively looked for the coin and the sheep, which could not return by them. In this story, the father watched and waited. He was dealing with a human being with a will of his own, but he was ready to greet his son if he returned.

In the same way, God's love is constant and patient and welcoming. He will search for us and give us opportunities to respond, but he will not force us to come to him. Like the father in this story, God waits patiently for us to come to our senses.

Use those opportunities God has given you.

Luke 23:55

As his body was taken away, the women from Galilee followed and saw the tomb where they placed his body.

The Galilean women followed Joseph to the tomb, so they knew exactly where to find Jesus' body when they returned after the Sabbath with their spices and perfumes. These women could not do "great" things for Jesus—they were not permitted to stand up before the Jewish council or the Roman governor and testify on his behalf—but they did what they could.

They stayed at the cross when most of the disciples had fled, and they got ready to anoint their Lord's body. Because of their devotion, they were the first to know about the resurrection. As believers, we may feel we can't do much for Jesus.

But we are called to take advantage of the opportunities given us, doing what we *can* do and not worrying about what we cannot do.

Looking for teachable moments.

Acts 3:11

They all rushed out to Solomon's Colonnade, where he was holding tightly to Peter and John. Everyone stood there in awe of the wonderful thing that had happened.

Peter had an audience, and he capitalized on the opportunity to share Jesus Christ. He clearly presented his message by telling

- (1) Who Jesus is,
- (2) How the Jews had rejected him,
- (3) Why their rejection was fatal, and
- (4) What they needed to do to change the situation.

Peter told the crowd that they still had a choice; God still offered them the opportunity to believe and receive Jesus as their Messiah and as their Lord. Displays of God's mercy and grace, such as the healing of this crippled man, often create teachable moments.

Pray to have courage like Peter to see these opportunities and to use them to speak up for Christ.

Paul used every opportunity to share the gospel.

Acts 25:23

So the next day Agrippa and Bernice arrived at the auditorium with great pomp, accompanied by military officers and prominent men of the city. Festus ordered that Paul be brought in.

Paul was in prison, but that didn't stop him from making the most of his situation. Military officers and prominent city leaders met in the palace room with Agrippa to hear this case. Paul saw this new audience as yet another opportunity to present the gospel. Rather than complain about your present situation, look for ways to use every opportunity to serve God and share him with others. Your problems may be opportunities in disguise.

Chapter 3



See your troubles as opportunities

2 Cor. 4:17

For our present troubles are quite small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever!

Our troubles should not diminish our faith or disillusion us. We should realize that there is a purpose in our suffering. Problems and human limitations have several benefits:

- (1) They remind us of Christ's suffering for us;
- (2) They keep us from pride;
- (3) They cause us to look beyond this brief life;
- (4) They prove our faith to others; and
- (5) They give God the opportunity to demonstrate his power. See your troubles as opportunities!

Look for opportunities to tell others about Jesus.

Ephes. 3:7

By God's special favor and mighty power, I have been given the wonderful privilege of serving him by spreading this Good News.

When Paul became a servant of the gospel, God gave him the ability to share effectively the gospel of Christ. You may not be an apostle or even an evangelist, but God will give you opportunities to tell others about Christ.

And with the opportunities he will provide the ability, courage, and power. Whenever an opportunity presents itself, make yourself available to God as his servant. As you focus on the other person and his or her needs, God will communicate your caring attitude. Your words will be natural, loving, and compelling.

Turning problems into opportunities

Philip. 1:12-14

And I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News.

For everyone here, including all the soldiers in the palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. And because of my imprisonment, many of the Christians here have gained confidence and become bolder in telling others about Christ.

Being imprisoned would cause many people to become bitter or to give up, but Paul saw it as one more opportunity to spread the Good News of Christ. Paul realized that his current circumstances weren't as important as what he did with them. Turning a bad situation into a good one, he reached out to the Roman soldiers who made up the palace guard and encouraged those Christians who were afraid of persecution.

We may not be in prison, but we still have plenty of opportunities to be discouraged—times of indecision, financial burdens, family conflict, church conflict, or the loss of our jobs. How we act in such situations will reflect what we believe.

Like Paul, look for ways to demonstrate your faith even in bad situations. Whether or not the situation improves, your faith will grow stronger.

Opportunities in life

Galatians 6:10

Whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone, especially to our Christian brothers and sisters.

It is discouraging to continue to do right and receive no word of thanks or see no tangible results. But Paul challenged the Galatians and he challenges us to keep on doing good and to trust God for the results. In due time, we will reap a harvest of blessing.

Opportunity to show compassion

Luke 10:33

"Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt deep pity.

There was deep hatred between Jews and Samaritans. The Jews saw themselves as pure descendants of Abraham, while the Samaritans were a mixed race produced when Jews from the northern kingdom intermarried with other peoples after Israel's exile.

To this law expert, the person least likely to act correctly would be the Samaritan. In fact, he could not bear to say "Samaritan" in answer to Jesus' question. This "expert's" attitude betrayed his lack of the very thing that he had earlier said the law commanded—love.

Chapter 4



Opportunities to preach

2 Tim. 4:2

Preach the word of God. Be persistent, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching.

It was important for Timothy to preach the gospel so that the Christian faith could spread throughout the world. We believe in Christ today because people like Timothy were faithful to their mission. It is still vitally important for believers to spread the gospel.

Half the people who have ever lived are alive today, and most of them do not know Christ. He is coming soon, and he wants to find his faithful believers ready for him. It may be inconvenient to take a stand for Christ or to tell others about his love, but preaching the Word of God is the most important responsibility the church and its members have been given. Be prepared for, courageous in, and sensitive to God-given opportunities to tell the Good News.

“Be prepared in season and out of season” means to always be ready to serve God in any situation, whether or not it is convenient. Be sensitive to the opportunities God gives you.

Paul told Timothy to “correct, rebuke and encourage.” It is difficult to accept correction, to be told we have to change. But no matter how much the truth hurts, we must be willing to listen to it so we can more fully obey God.

Opportunity to tell the good news

2 Kings 5:1-3

The king of Aram had high admiration for Naaman, the commander of his army, because through him the Lord had given Aram great victories. But though Naaman was a mighty warrior, he suffered from leprosy.

Now groups of Aramean raiders had invaded the land of Israel, and among their captives was a young girl who had been given to Naaman's wife as a maid. One day the girl said to her mistress, "I wish my master would go to see the prophet in Samaria. He would heal him of his leprosy."

Leprosy, much like AIDS today, was one of the most feared diseases of the time. Some forms were extremely contagious and, in many cases, incurable. In its worst forms, leprosy led to death. Many lepers were forced out of the cities into quarantined camps. Because Naaman still held his post, he probably had a mild form of the disease, or perhaps it was still in the early stages. In either case, his disease would have tragically shortened his life. (For more about leprosy in Bible times, see the note on ■Leviticus 13:1ff.)

Aram was Israel's neighbor to the northeast, but the two nations were rarely on

friendly terms. Under David, Aram paid tribute to Israel. In Elisha's day, Aram was growing in power and frequently conducted raids on Israel, trying to frustrate the people and bring about political confusion. Israelite captives were often taken back to Aram after successful raids. Naaman's servant girl was an Israelite, kidnapped from her home and family. Ironically, Naaman's only hope of being cured came from Israel.

The little girl's faith and Naaman's quest contrast with the stubbornness of Israel's king (2 Kings 5:7). A leader in mighty Aram sought the God of Israel; Israel's own king would not. We don't know the little girl's name or much about her, but her brief word to her mistress brought healing and faith in God to a powerful Aramean captain. God had placed her for a purpose, and she was faithful. Where has God put you? No matter how humble or small your position, God can use you to spread his Word. Look for opportunities to tell others what God can do. There's no telling who will hear your message!

Let nothing stop your opportunities

Neh. 2:2-5

So the king asked me, "Why are you so sad? You aren't sick, are you? You look like a man with deep troubles."

Then I was badly frightened, but I replied, "Long live the king! Why shouldn't I be sad? For the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins, and the gates have been burned down."

The king asked, "Well, how can I help you?" With a prayer to the God of heaven, I replied, "If it please Your Majesty and if you are pleased with me, your servant, send me to Judah to rebuild the city where my ancestors are buried."

The king noticed Nehemiah's sad appearance. This frightened Nehemiah because it was dangerous to show sorrow before the king, who could execute anyone who displeased him. Anyone wearing sackcloth (mourning clothes) was barred from the palace (Esther 4:2).

Nehemiah wasn't ashamed to admit his fear, but he refused to allow fear to stop him from doing what God had called him to do. When we allow our fears to rule us, we make fear more powerful than God. Is there a task God wants you to do, but fear is holding you back? God is greater than all your fears. Recognizing why you are afraid is the first step in committing it to God. Realize that if God has called you to a task, he will help you accomplish it.

With little time to think, Nehemiah immediately prayed. Eight times in this book we read that he prayed spontaneously (Neh. 2:4; Neh. 4:4-5, 9; Neh. 5:19; Neh. 6:14; Neh. 13:14, 22, 29). Nehemiah prayed at any time, even while talking with others.

He knew that God is always in charge, is always present, and hears and answers every prayer. Nehemiah could confidently pray throughout the day because he had established an intimate relationship with God during times of extended prayer (Neh. 1:4-7). If we want to reach God with our emergency prayers, we need to take time to cultivate a strong relationship with God through times of in-depth prayer.

Timing in opportunities is important.

Daniel 2:14-16

When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, came to kill them, Daniel handled the situation with wisdom and discretion.

He asked Arioch, “Why has the king issued such a harsh decree?” So Arioch told him all that had happened.

Daniel went at once to see the king and requested more time so he could tell the king what the dream meant.

Daniel was at a crisis point. Imagine going to see the powerful, temperamental king who had just angrily ordered your death!

Daniel did not shrink back in fear, however, but confidently believed God would tell him all the king wanted to know.

When the king gave Daniel time to find the answer, Daniel found his three friends and they prayed.

When you find yourself in a tight spot, share your needs with trusted friends who also believe in God’s power.

Prayer is more effective than panic. Panic confirms your hopelessness; prayer confirms your hope in God. Daniel’s trust in God saved himself, his three friends, and all the other wise men of Babylon.

Opportunities to bring correction

Acts 18:24-26

Meanwhile, a Jew named Apollos, an eloquent speaker who knew the Scriptures well, had just arrived in Ephesus from Alexandria in Egypt. He had been taught the way of the Lord and talked to others with great enthusiasm and accuracy about Jesus. However, he knew only about John's baptism.

When Priscilla and Aquila heard him preaching boldly in the synagogue, they took him aside and explained the way of God more accurately.

Apollos had heard only what John the Baptist had said about Jesus (see Luke 3:1-18), so his message was not the complete story. John focused on repentance from sin, the first step. But the whole message is to repent from sin and then believe in Christ.

Apollos did not know about Jesus' life, crucifixion, and resurrection. Nor did he know about the coming of the Holy Spirit. Priscilla and Aquila explained the way of salvation to him.

Opportunity to help a stranger

Col. 4:5

Live wisely among those who are not Christians, and make the most of every opportunity.

We should be wise in our contacts with non-Christians (“outsiders”), making the most of our opportunities to tell them the Good News of salvation. What opportunities do you have?

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Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007.

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