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UNSTOPPABLE OPPORTUNITIES



When has a "chance" encounter changed your life?

QUESTION #1

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THE POINT

We intersect daily with people who need Christ.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

In the early 70s, Bill Fernandez had two friends named Steve. Out walking around the neighborhood one afternoon with one of them, Bill saw the other Steve washing his car. It seemed like the perfect opportunity to introduce his two friends.

And that's how Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak met. The two hit it off immediately, both having an avid interest in technology. Years later, the two Steves co-founded a little company called Apple®. A chance meeting led to the founding of one of the world's most highly valued businesses.¹

Wait a minute. A *chance* meeting? As a follower of Christ, I hesitate to call the encounters I have with people mere “chance” meetings. These unplanned intersections can be “divine appointments”—opportunities that can change the direction of a life.

In Acts 3, Peter and John took advantage of just such an unplanned meeting to do something incredible for God.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Acts 3:1-4

¹ Now Peter and John were going up together to the temple complex at the hour of prayer at three in the afternoon. ² And a man who was lame from birth was carried there and placed every day at the temple gate called Beautiful, so he could beg from those entering the temple complex. ³ When he saw Peter and John about to enter the temple complex, he asked for help. ⁴ Peter, along with John, looked at him intently and said, “Look at us.”

Peter and John chose a busy intersection in Jerusalem to share the gospel. Three o’clock in the afternoon was one of the times designated daily for prayer; it was also the time for one of the two daily sacrifices. Therefore, it was a busy time at the temple with large crowds coming to pray and offer sacrifices.

Before they started, Peter and John saw a disabled man begging from those who passed. This was similar to scenes we might see in urban America. I say we *might* see, because so many of us choose not to see. We walk on, avoiding eye contact.

Notice two truths from Peter and John’s interaction with this lame beggar:

- ▶ **Individuals matter.** Peter and John had just seen 3,000 people come to Christ in one day, but they still saw and cared about an individual. They did just what Jesus did—they looked at the lame man as if, at that moment, no one else in the world mattered.
- ▶ **Intersections bring opportunity.** Just as we often drove through crossroads without really seeing what’s there, we can also fail to notice the people we intersect with each day. God put us on this pathway called life, and we need to be aware of those who come and go in our lives.

How can we get better at noticing the opportunities God gives us to love others?

QUESTION #2

Up to this point, the beggar at the temple may have felt like no one ever noticed him. But no more. Peter said to him, “Look at us.” Peter was acknowledging the man’s presence and worth: “We see you. You are not invisible to us. We want to help.”

Thanks to the willingness of Peter and John to turn a divine interruption into an unstoppable opportunity, this man’s life was about to change. Forever.

Acts 3:5-8

⁵ So he turned to them, expecting to get something from them. ⁶ But Peter said, “I don’t have silver or gold, but what I have, I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!” ⁷ Then, taking him by the right hand he raised him up, and at once his feet and ankles became strong. ⁸ So he jumped up, stood, and started to walk, and he entered the temple complex with them—walking, leaping, and praising God.

There is an old Quaker proverb that states: “I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good therefore that I can do, nor any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.”

Those words reflect Peter and John’s attitude toward the beggar. They didn’t rationalize the way many people do when accosted by panhandlers: *I don’t have any money. Someone else will help. He’ll always be here begging. His relatives should provide for him. He should get a job.* Instead, Peter and John saw someone in need and viewed his need as an opportunity God had placed in their path.

“Peter said, ‘I don’t have silver or gold, but what I have, I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!’” He took the disabled man by the right hand and pulled him to his feet. The man, who had been “lame from birth” (v. 2), may have expected to topple to the ground immediately; yet his feet and ankles supported him perfectly.

When have you seen Jesus make a dramatic difference in someone’s life?

QUESTION #3

COMMUNITY INTERSECTIONS

Use the space below to make a sketch or map of your community. Place an X on the main locations where different types of people gather on a regular basis.

How can your group use one or more of the locations above to create intersections with other people in your community?

"God needs no one,
but when faith is present
He works through anyone."

—A.W. TOZER

Think of the wild emotional ride the man surely must have experienced: disappointment when Peter told him he would receive no money; terror at being yanked to his feet; and finally, overwhelming joy when he was suddenly whole.

Think about these truths whenever you have a chance to give:

- ▶ **Peter and John gave what they had.** God always supplies what we need to do His work; otherwise, He wouldn't have brought us to that intersection. Even when we feel ill-equipped, we can take a step of faith.
- ▶ **Peter and John relied on Jesus.** The apostles didn't have the power to heal; Jesus did. When they said, "In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk," they were acknowledging the power and authority of Jesus to heal.

When we begin to open our eyes to the needs around us, it can be overwhelming. People in physical, emotional, and spiritual need are everywhere. Where do we begin—and how do we help with problems so deep-seated?

We must rely on the Holy Spirit to guide and empower us.



Acts 3:9-10

⁹ All the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ and they recognized that he was the one who used to sit and beg at the Beautiful Gate of the temple complex. So they were filled with awe and astonishment at what had happened to him.

The crowd responded with awe and astonishment. And why not? The man had been lame since birth. When a man has been unable to stand or walk for “over 40 years” (4:22), he just doesn’t suddenly get better. So when the crowd saw this man standing, walking, and even leaping and praising God, it rightly got their attention!

If you read the rest of Acts 3, you’ll see Peter grabbed this opportunity to talk about Jesus to all those who had come to the temple to worship. One opportunity to talk to one man about Jesus led to another opportunity. As a result, the number of the men alone who believed swelled to about 5,000 (see 4:4). It’s the ripple effect: one opportunity leads to another. One changed life leads to another, and another.

Edward Kimball took an interest in a 17-year-old teenager and determined to reach out to him in the name of Jesus. In the shoe store where the young man worked, Kimball led Dwight L. Moody to faith in Christ. Moody would go on to lead thousands to faith in Christ, impacting a whole generation on two continents. Edward Kimball was an ordinary man, just like Peter and John—and just like us. God will take our little acts of obedience and multiply them a thousand times over.

One “yes” to the God-given opportunity in front of you can lead to ongoing impact. One “yes” can bring further opportunities. Because Peter and John responded to the man in their path, they had the opportunity to preach to a crowd. Multitudes responded, bringing more opportunities for ministry.

What does that mean for you? Say, “Yes.”

How have you been affected personally by others’ obedience to Christ?

QUESTION #4

How can we make room now so we can say yes to future opportunities to serve?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

How will you make the most of the intersections and opportunities that come your way this week? Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ **Look.** Search for such opportunities. Allow your schedule to be interrupted in order to minister by listening, offering encouragement, praying with someone, or meeting a need.
- ▶ **Go for it.** Take the steps of obedience that you've been putting off recently. Take a leap of faith and do what you know God has been calling you to do.
- ▶ **Sign up.** You don't have to wait for opportunities to fall in your lap through the regular intersections of life. Consider talking with a staff person at your church and signing up for ministry opportunities that match your gifts.



To follow Jesus is to serve a sovereign God—a God familiar with every nuance of your life and the lives of others. That doesn't leave much room for random chance. Therefore, be ready to respond when opportunities come your way.

My thoughts

1. <http://www.techrepublic.com/article/apples-first-employee-the-remarkable-odyssey-of-bill-fernandez/>

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