



SESSION 4

UNSTOPPABLE OPPORTUNITIES

▶ **The Point**

We intersect daily with people who need Christ.

▶ **The Passage**

Acts 3:1-10

▶ **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.⁸

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.

▶ **The Setting**

The early Christian church in Jerusalem was comprised mainly of Jewish men and women, most of whom continued to participate in the Jewish rituals and worship of their community. One day, as Peter and John were going up to the temple complex to take part in the afternoon hour of prayer, they encountered a lame man begging at the temple gate. They used this opportunity to demonstrate the power of Jesus Christ to this lame man and to all those present at the temple.

What does the Bible say?

Temple complex (v. 1)—The center of Jewish worship, the temple had received a major renovation starting around 20 B.C. The result was a grand complex with several new walls, courtyards, and gates, one of which was the Beautiful Gate (see v. 2).

Acts 3:1-10

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.”

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.

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.



10 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

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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."

READ: Acts 3:1-4 on page 93 of the PSG. Read the text out loud or ask a volunteer to do so.

GUIDE: Use the first three paragraphs on page 119 of this Leader Guide to provide some context and background information for this story.

RECAP: Highlight the bullet list on page 93 of the PSG to emphasize these two truths from Peter and John's encounter with the 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.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 93 of the PSG: **"How can we get better at noticing the opportunities God gives us to love others?"**

Note: Encourage group members to think about this question as individuals and as a community.

TRANSITION: As we continue with the story in Acts 3, we'll see Peter identify the crux of the matter by moving the conversation away from silver and gold—and onto something much more valuable.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
What emotions do you experience when God interrupts your day?

Acts 3:1-4 Commentary

[Verse 1] Peter and John were on their way to the temple, apparently to participate in the **hour of prayer** that happened each day **at three in the afternoon**. This was the time of the evening sacrifice. The apostles may have gone to the temple in pairs to witness as well as to worship. Likely they learned this from Jesus, who had sent them out in pairs on their mission to share the good news of the kingdom (see Luke 10:1).

[Verse 2] One **gate** in the temple was known by the name **Beautiful**. This may have been what was known as the Nicanor Gate in rabbinic literature. Outside the gate, **a man** was strategically **placed** where he could **beg** for alms from generous worshipers **entering the temple complex**. One essential practice of Judaism taught by the rabbis was almsgiving. By the New Testament period, alms could take the form of either charitable monetary giving or good deeds. To practice almsgiving was to be righteous. Since there was no government assistance, financial support for the needy was essential.

Many Old Testament passages note God's concern for the poor, and a number of laws highlight the expectation for God's people to provide for those in need (see Ex. 23:6-7; Lev. 19:10; 23:22; Deut. 15:7-11). This practice is also found in the New Testament, where believers gave to help needy Christians (see Acts 4:32-35; Rom. 15:25-27; 2 Cor. 8-9) and where providing for others in need is noted as a natural and expected result of experiencing the love of Christ (see Jas. 1:27; 1 John 3:17-18).

The man was **lame from birth**; family or friends carried him daily to the temple where he would sit to beg. This was most likely the only way he could get any money to help provide for his needs. The time of the evening services at the temple would have been one of the best times for begging, as people coming to and from the temple would have been more inclined to practice piety by giving alms to the needy.

[Verses 3-4] Peter and John were on their way into the temple complex when the lame man saw them. As he probably did countless times every day, the man cried out as people passed by. He **asked for help** from Peter and John as they approached him. The apostles' response on that day must have been quite unexpected. Rather than hurrying past him, they gave focused attention to him and saw his need. Because they were concerned about him, they directed him to **"Look at us."** The man evidently had turned away from them—probably to beg for alms from other passersby—so they had to get his attention before they proceeded to talk with him.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Acts 3:5-8

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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.

DO: Ask group members to complete the activity "Community Intersections" on page 95 of the PSG. If time permits, encourage volunteers to share their responses.



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?

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

When have you felt led to care for someone in need?

READ: Acts 3:5-8 on page 94 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 94 of the PSG: "**When have you seen Jesus make a dramatic difference in someone's life?**"

RECAP: Encourage group members to think through these principles on giving from page 96 of the PSG:

- ▶ **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.

TRANSITION: As we move to verses 9-10, we'll see that the apostles' encounter with the lame man led to more than one life being changed.

Acts 3:5-8 Commentary

[Verses 5-6] The lame man simply expected **to get something from** Peter and John. But his expectation was quickly disappointed. Immediately **Peter** spoke and said, **“I don’t have silver or gold, but what I have, I give you.”** Then Peter invoked **the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene**. A person’s *name* represented everything about the person, especially the person’s attributes and characteristics. Thus, *the name of Jesus Christ* represented His divine identity, authority, and power. Calling on the name of Jesus Christ was not a magical formula that forced Jesus to act (as the story in Acts 19:13-17 confirms). Rather, it was a declaration of the power and authority of the Lord to heal the man and the means by which Christ’s power was released to work through Peter.

By identifying Jesus as **the Nazarene**, Peter was stating that this was the same Jesus from the town of Nazareth who had ministered throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. This was the same Jesus who had done miraculous things people had talked about. This was the same Jesus who was crucified by the Romans. This was the same Jesus who a large group of Jews believed was raised from the dead and was still the subject of conversation in Jerusalem. This was the same Jesus who Peter called on as he commanded the man to **“get up and walk!”**

[Verse 7] Peter then reached out and grabbed the man’s **right hand** and **raised him up**. Similar to some of Jesus’ healing miracles, Peter’s touch was the conduit through which God’s power flowed to bring healing and enabled the lame man to stand up. Complete healing happened **at once** for the formerly lame man. As Peter pulled him up, the man discovered **his feet and ankles** had instantly become **strong**.

[Verse 8] The man wasted no time getting familiar with his new legs. First the man **jumped up**. Then the man **stood**. After that he **started to walk**. The tense of the Greek verb indicates that he continued to walk. The first place the formerly lame man went was into the **temple complex** with Peter and John. The man who had formerly sat outside the temple at its entrance now entered into the temple on his own two feet. While in the temple the man was **walking** and **leaping**. The Greek word for *leaping* is the same word used by Jesus to describe the living water He offers, which is “springing up within” those who drink it (see John 4:14).

Inside the temple, the man went beyond simply exercising his new legs. He was also **praising God**. He knew he had received a great gift—actually a miracle—and he joyfully acknowledged God as its source. By his words and his actions he couldn’t help but let others know what had happened to him.



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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.

READ: Acts 3:9-10 on page 97 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 97 of the PSG: **“How have you been affected personally by others’ obedience to Christ?”**

Note: Don’t be alarmed if there is a notable silence after you ask this question; it requires reflection before answering. Be sure to give your group members enough time to think through their past experiences and develop an answer they feel comfortable sharing.

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points on page 97 of the PSG:

1. “The crowd responded with awe and astonishment. And why not? The man had been lame since birth.”
2. “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.”
3. “One ‘yes’ to the God-given opportunity in front of you can lead to ongoing impact. One ‘yes’ can bring further opportunities.”

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 97 of the PSG: **“How can we make room now so we can say yes to future opportunities to serve?”**

Note: The goal of this question is to help group members think through practical steps they can take in the short term that will allow them to better take advantage of opportunities to serve in the long term.

GUIDE: Refer back to “The Point” for this session: **“We intersect daily with people who need Christ.”** As time allows, encourage volunteers to share any final thoughts and questions.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What’s our role in creating opportunities to meet needs and share the gospel?

Acts 3:9-10 Commentary

[Verses 9-10] The formerly lame man's actions created quite a commotion. Evidently it was very unusual for a worshiper to leap about and shout praises to God in the **temple complex**. Thus, it's no wonder that **all the people** took notice of him and his conduct. While Isaiah had prophesied that in the messianic age, "Then the lame will leap like a deer" (Isa. 35:6), apparently no one expected it to happen in that place at that time.

Just as importantly, the people **recognized** the man. They had seen him for years as they walked to the temple. He was in fact the same man **who used to sit and beg at the Beautiful Gate**. The people knew the man and his previous condition of being lame. But undeniably something miraculous had happened to the lame man, because now they saw him walking around praising God.

Their response was to be expected: **they were filled with awe and astonishment**. Only Luke used these words in the New Testament. The Greek term for "awe" (*thambos*) describes a reaction to a sudden event that can be a response of either amazement or fear. The Greek word for *astonishment* (*ekstasis*, from which we get our English word "ecstasy") is sometimes translated as "visionary state" elsewhere in the Scriptures (see Acts 10:10; 11:5; 22:17). The word can refer to a mind that's been thrown out of its normal state.

This was what the people in the temple experienced—the formerly lame man walking, jumping, and praising God right before their very eyes. This was not normal! What they saw stopped them in their tracks. They were overwhelmed with a sense of reverent fear at the miracle they witnessed.

However, awe and astonishment are not the same as repentance and faith. A person can be astonished by someone or something without realizing the true meaning and purpose behind the event. In Acts 3:11-26, Peter would seize the opportunity to preach to the people in the temple, proclaiming that the miracle the crowd had observed of the man formerly lame healed and walking bore witness to the reality of the power of God and the salvation now available from God through His Messiah, Jesus Christ.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 98 of the PSG. Encourage them to consider the following suggestions for making the most of the intersections and opportunities that will come their way this week:



- ▶ **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.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the Conclusion from page 98 of the PSG:

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.

PRAY: Conclude by proclaiming your desire to take advantage of the divine appointments that come your way each week. Ask God's Spirit to bless you and your group members with eyes to see those opportunities whenever they arise.



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Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.