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Embracing Opportunity **Luke 9:10-17**

PRAY

(OVERHEAD)

When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida

So let's catch up on the scene. The disciples have returned from being sent out...as we saw last week they had amazing stories of transformation to report. Jesus gave them authority to heal people spiritually, physically and eternally in their work study program. They got out of the classroom. Now they are back and Jesus attempts to take them to an isolated spot in Bethsaida some 4 miles east of Capernaum.

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¹¹...but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.

So Jesus, wanting to get his crew alone, encounters the crowds once again. Jesus sees the opportunity in this circumstance. Late in the afternoon the disciples are like...“We’ve been at this all day. The people are exhausted...we’re exhausted. These people have to get home...for some of them, it’s going to take them hours if not days to get back to their village.

Verse 14 tells us there were **about 5,000 men** there. It’s late in the day and they are tired and hungry. If you were to add wives to the ‘men’ you’ve now got a crowd of 10,000 tired hungry people. Kick in another 1 or 2 kids, which is ultra conservative seeing how they didn’t have birth control, and you could easily estimate the crowd total to be around 20,000 tired and hungry people. Verse 12:

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¹²Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, “Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here.”

Church, this is an enormous situation. There’s no food, no lodging, no port-a-potties and worse yet...they probably don’t have a permit from the county...so this is serious. Now the disciples come up with a reasonable, logical, level-headed approach to the problem. They identify it, assess it, weigh the options and act on it. Brilliant plan! Except for one small detail...it wasn’t God’s plan. They dove head-long into “fix-it” mode and not once asked the Lord who was standing right there, what His thoughts were about it.

So Jesus takes the opportunity, not only to minister to this crowd, but to teach His disciples how to make the most of opportunities right under their noses. Making the most of our opportunities begins by understanding what the Lords will is...

Eph. 5:15-17 says:

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¹⁵*Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.*

The disciples are like, “We’ve got to send them out of here to find lodging and food, because it’s going to be dark soon.” And Jesus is like, “Or you could feed them.”

Verse 13:

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¹³*He replied, “**You give them something to eat.**”*

Then the disciples answered...and I want you to hear the twinge of sarcasm in their answer:

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“We have only five loaves of bread and two fish—unless we go and buy food for all this crowd.”

Notice their pessimism...In Mark gospel account they respond with: “...*it would take eight months of a man’s wages to feed all these people*”! They’re saying “We don’t have food ourselves.” You can almost feel the tightening in their chest, that tingling sensation that creeps up your spine, grabs your neck and sends your brain into panic mode. “You want us to do what?”

Have you ever been asked to do something by God that just seems and feels impossible? Have you ever been asked by God to do something where you’re going, “I don’t even know how I possibly could be obedient to this?” Here are the disciples with 5 loaves of bread and a couple fish. And their looking over a crowd of some 20,000 tired and hungry people, with basically enough for two sandwiches and Jesus is saying, “Feed them all.”

These guys did not **Embrace the Opportunity** right in front of them. They saw a problem that needed fixed and they came up with a good plan...but it wasn’t God’s plan.

Eph. 5:16 tells us we’re to **make the most of every opportunity**. In other words, “If you want to understand the Lord’s will, be wise by looking for the opportunities He sets before you, especially in impossible circumstances.” We need to get out of the “fix-it” mode and into “opportunity” mode.

EXAMPLE:

When NASA began the launch of astronauts into space, they couldn’t get their pens to work at zero gravity. To **fix** their problem they hired Andersen Consulting. Ten years and \$12 million later they had a pen that worked at zero gravity. And what did the Russians do? They seized the opportunity and used a pencil!

For some crazy reason, Jesus chooses to use us. So, in order to respond we have to ‘Embrace the Opportunities’ He places in front of us. So let’s look at a few practical applications to encourage us.

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1. Discipleship is not a Spectator Sport

Have you been watching the Olympics? I have a few highlights. Watching Shawn White snowboard for Gold was incredible. It doesn't matter what sport you watch...even team sports like Hockey – You see this limited few out in the game competing with hundreds in the stands watching. Sadly, it can be like that with Christians.

Jesus wants **all** of His disciples/followers to engage in ministry...partnering with Him to bring the Kingdom of God to earth. That's why He sent out the 12 in Luke 9:1 and why in Luke 10 we'll see Jesus send out 72. Look at verse 14:

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But he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each."¹⁵The disciples did so, and everybody sat down.¹⁶Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to set before the people.

Jesus worked through these guys just like He does with us. Why? Because once we come to believe in Christ as Savior, we can't stay there, we need to move on in making Him Lord of our lives. It would be like being born and staying an infant our entire life. That's not God's plan! His plan is for us to join Him in His work, as we come under His direction, authority and leadership.

The temptation is to negotiate life by ourselves. To 'fix' things rather than seeing the 'opportunities' Jesus has for us. We have to live life from His perspective not ours. The disciples left the Lord almost entirely out of the equation...why do we do that? Why do we first exhaust all our resources before we come to Him?

Why do we wait until we're in so much pain before coming? Maybe we've grown too comfortable with just being spectators.

True Disciples of Christ are in the game. Because they are...they have a different vantage point.

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2. Problems are Disguised Opportunities

Did any of you, like me, come to Christ with some expectation that Christianity would somehow dissolve all of your problems...especially the seemingly impossible ones? Ever ask yourself... 'Why is following Christ so hard?' Have you come up with answers?

Over and over again Jesus placed his Disciples in seemingly impossible situations. Why? In part, because He wanted to change the way they thought about and processed problems. He wanted them...just like He wants us, to learn how to look at life from His perspective. **To see that often times the dilemmas we face are really opportunities for Jesus to reveal Himself to people who know Him...and people who do not know Him.**

In this dilemma the Lord asked the disciples to do something they were incapable of doing. **Jesus allowed in His disciples and often in our lives, what Henry Blackaby in His book "Experiencing God" calls: 'A Crisis of belief'.** And church, this is where so many believers bail out on God. It's a 'Crisis of Belief' – the word crisis comes from a word meaning 'decision.' God will allow difficulty situations into our lives with the intention of giving us the opportunity to choose.

How we respond when faced with this choice will determine whether we become part of something God-sized...that only He can do or whether you will continue to go our own way and miss the opportunity He has placed before us. It's crucial that we walk our faith forward with an opportunistic mindset.

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3. When Opportunity Knocks...Open the Door

When problems come...and they will, resist the temptation to problem solve. Loose the mindset that says, "How can I fix this." The problem with those disciples...is often our problem. See, it's not the fact that there is a problem, rather, it's how we think about the problem. They didn't recognize Jesus inviting them to join Him in His work.

When we join God in what He's doing then He can work through us. If it looks too big...even better...don't worry - Jesus said in Mark 10:27 ***"With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."***

The disciples had already seen Jesus do amazing things: heal, drive out demons, calm the storm, and raise Jairus' daughter from the dead. How is it possible that now, when opportunity knocked, it didn't even occur to them that maybe, just maybe God wanted to do something super-natural through them.

We have to look for opportunities and when it knocks...open the door. Resist the temptation to fix things ourselves...we may meet the need – But God isn't interested in just feeding hungry bellies for a day. He wants to feed souls and spirits for eternity. The only way people will ever sense God's involvement is and throw our lives is if we allow God to work through the opportunities He provides...but we have to open the door when it knocks.

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4. Problems are Opportunities for God to Reveal Himself Though Us

People say, "God will never give me more than I can handle." Nowhere in scripture does it say that. 1 Cor. 10 says; ***He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.*** But church, nowhere in scripture does it teach that life won't deal you more than you can handle.

The older I'm getting the more I'm learning that I rarely have what it takes to get through life's challenges. Life is often too difficult and more than I can bear. But I'm also learning that life's challenges and trials are God's opportunities and if I open the door to opportunity knocking then something amazing happens.

When I lean on God not only does He reveal himself to me by demonstrating His strength, kindness and provision, but He reaches beyond me to minister to other people. Verse 17:

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They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.

- Why did God tell Abraham & Sarah they would conceive a child beyond child-bearing years? To reveal Himself!
- Why did he tell Moses to cross the Red Sea? To reveal Himself!
- Why did he tell Gideon to take 300 men and fight the Midianite's army of 120,000? To reveal Himself?

Why is that insurmountable difficulty in your life right now? Maybe, just maybe God wants to reveal Himself! Jesus not only feeds this massive crowd that day, but the disciples picked up 12 baskets of broken pieces that were left over.