

Missed Opportunities

2 Corinthians 6:1-2 [NIV] *“As God’s fellow-workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. For he says, “In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.” I tell you, now is the time of God’s favour, now is the day of salvation.”*

All whom God has called in their lifetime are having their opportunity for salvation **now**.

The rest of humanity will have their opportunity through a future resurrection.

1 Peter 4:17 [NIV] *“For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?”*

All Christians [created family of God] are being judged during their present life as to whether they will be given salvation.

What type of people are the vast number of Christians?

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 [NIV] *“Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things, and the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, so that no-one may boast before him.”*

Most of us Christians are exactly as quoted above.

In this article I wish to show you the general characteristics that are found in this type of person described by Paul, who must have seen such people in the church of God in Corinth.

I also want to show what God desires to do with such people, and what they have to do with this knowledge they are given themselves.

Characteristics of the un-wise of this world

1. We don’t recognise opportunities when they come our way.

Luke 9:57-62 [NIV] *“As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” He said to another man, “Follow me.” But **the man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”** Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Still **another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.”** Jesus replied, “**No-one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.**”*

All of these men were offered the chance to walk and talk with the future “King of kings.”

Their names could have been as well known to all humanity as Philip, Timothy, Stephen, yet all we know them as “a man” or “another man” or “another.”

These were all “yes but” men. They had been attracted to Jesus Christ and His teaching but could **not** see the great opportunity that was being offered to them.

They all had “put their hand to the plough” but then looked back to their old life.

Note:- What these people missed out on was “*service*” in the created family of God.

Jesus Christ described these “*yes but*” human beings in a parable about a farmer sowing, seed, broadcast on His land.

Luke 8:14 [NIV] *“The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.”*

Their worldly cares were greater than the excitement of the opportunity to mature in the presence of their Saviour, Jesus Christ.

A very short-sighted decision.

All the worldly wise of this world have their eyes open to see opportunities to become great and powerful.

Look at the example of Henry Ford.

As he watched his father produce a car in his workshop he noticed just how much time the workforce spent collecting each part of their car to assemble it.

Hence the end product was well beyond the financial reach of the average human.

Henry Ford introduced mass production assembly line production of cars, bringing the work to the worker.

He was also, because of this method of production, able to offer higher wages to attract the hard working, skilled engineers, yet produce a low cost vehicle.

Henry Ford saw an opportunity and grasped it with both hands instantly.

2. We don’t recognise the value of an opportunity.

Matthew 19:16-23 [NIV] *“Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” “Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.” “Which ones?” the man enquired. Jesus replied, “‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honour your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbour as yourself.’” “All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?” Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” **When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.** Then Jesus said to his disciples, “I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

Blinded to the real value of what he recognised as an opportunity to greater things, that is, the eternal life he was seeking.

You might say this doesn’t apply to me, I’m not a rich person.

Comparatively, all of us in the “*West*” are very wealthy nowadays, **not** without food, shelter and sufficient to live a comfortable life.

Such sufficiency tends to make us like the rich man we have just read about.

a) Sufficiency gives us a false sense of independence

We feel we can deal with most situations that may arise without the help of others.

Laodicea [the town referred to in **Revelation 3:14-18**] was extensively damaged by a major earthquake, the central Roman government offered help, but the Laodiceans rejected their help. Historians said *“they rose from the ruins entirely by their own resources.”*

Jesus Christ recognised this attitude of self-sufficiency.

Revelation 3:17-18 [NIV] *“You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so that you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so that you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so that you can see.”*

Through the apostle John, Jesus Christ warned such people of the need to change.

b) Sufficiency shackles us to this society

If we find our desires are linked with this society’s way of life we will find it very difficult to look to a different way of life where we become dependent on our Saviour and Master, Jesus Christ.

After a tour of a very comfortable home and gardens of a wealthy man, Dr. Johnson remarked to him, *“these are the things which make it hard to die.”*

Matthew 16:24-26 [NIV] *“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?’”*

When we realise the value of the opportunity we are being offered we will become willing to *“die a little”* as far as what this society can offer us.

c) Sufficiency tends to make us selfish

There is a very true saying *“enough is always a little more than we now have.”*

We lose the impulse to give and develop an attitude of clinging on to what we have.

We forget what Jesus Christ said *“we lose what we seek to keep and gain what we give away.”*

This is especially referring to time of which our life is composed.

Matthew 19:23-26 [NIV] *“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, ‘Who then can be saved?’ Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’”*

“Eye of a needle.” Jesus Christ may have been referring to the small door beside the main city gate which are referred to as *“the needle’s eye.”*

Any camel would have to shed its load to accomplish entry into the city this way.

Matthew 19:27 [NIV] *“Peter answered him, ‘We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?’”*

Peter didn’t yet see the value of the opportunity being offered him.

Matthew 19:28 [NIV] *“Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.’”*

This was the magnitude of the opportunity that was being offered to Peter and the other apostles.

Matthew 19:29 [NIV] *“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.”*

Which of these would we find **too** hard to give up?

It is **not** just riches in themselves that is our problem but the attitude we have towards them.

Zacchaeus, Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus were all rich men who were willing to unburden riches, just like the camel, to enter into the Kingdom of God, the created family of God.

3. Generally we leave it too late to grasp an opportunity.

Any good businessman is constantly looking for a product or service that will fill a need.

When such a product and need is recognised they will seek to provide it instantly, not waiting to follow another and find they are only left with the “*crumbs*” – most likely bad risk customers.

Too late and too little effort.

Matthew 25:1-4 [NIV] *“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. **The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them.** The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps.”*

God tells us **not** to delay or we could lose out.

Matthew 25:5-13 [NIV] *“The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ “‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’ “**But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived.** The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. “Later the others also came. ‘Sir! Sir!’ they said. ‘Open the door for us!’ “**But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’** “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”*

We need to grasp any opportunity to become ready for the return of Jesus Christ.

Romans 12:1-2 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

Allow the knowledge of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ, and the great reward we may receive at His return, to motivate us to constant gratitude, and total surrender to God’s Will.

Separate ourselves from this society, which is so self-centred, by a complete change of mind.

Setting ourselves a new goal in life, by grasping **now**, today, the wonderful opportunity God is offering us.

4. Knowing these weaknesses, how is God going to act, and how does He want us to respond?

a) God opens our mind to the opportunity

Proverbs 9:1-6 [NIV] *“Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out its seven pillars. She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table. She has sent out her maids, and she calls from the highest point of the city. “Let all who are simple come in here!” she says to those who lack judgment. “Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding.”*

God wants us to accept His Wisdom.

Remember all of Proverbs are directed to young men, the sons of Solomon, Agur and Lemuel, so presenting wisdom to them by young maidens will make it very attractive.

The food and wine also add to the attraction of seeking God’s Wisdom.

b) God puts before us life or death

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 [NIV] *“This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”*

If we turn our back on the opportunity that God is offering us then we are **choosing** to die eternally.

Exodus 14:1-3 [NIV] *“Then the LORD said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites to turn back and camp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. They are to camp by the sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon. Pharaoh will think, ‘The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.’”*

God led the Israelites into a “boxed canyon,” in order for them to focus on the opportunity that God was offering them, to trust Him to lead them into the Promised Land.

They had the mountains on two sides, Pharaoh’s army behind them and the sea in front of them, near to which they were to camp.

Humanly they were in an impossible position.

Exodus 14:10-12 [NIV] *“As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!”*

They could see **no** good in their situation.

This was, remember, after being brought out of captivity by God performing miracles on their behalf.

Exodus 14:13-14 [NIV] *“Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.”*

This is the way God wants to help us if we but ask Him.

Trust God and expect the same power to be available to us today.

If we value and use this power God will act in the same way as He did for the Israelites.

Exodus 14:19-20 [NIV] *“Then the angel of God, who had been travelling in front of Israel’s army, withdrew and went behind them. **The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other; so neither went near the other all night long.**”*

God will come between us and the trials we face in our new Christian life.

The cloud is likened to the Word of God, the Christian Bible, which is darkness to most but light to all Christians who are empowered by the Holy Spirit, to understand the truth.

John 14:17 [NIV] *“**the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.**”*

Most of society do **not** have the truth about life and death because they do **not** accept the Holy Spirit of God.

1 Corinthians 2:6-10 [NIV] *“**We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him,” but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.**”*

The Holy Spirit reveals to us this great opportunity.

1 Corinthians 2:11-14 [NIV] *“**For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no-one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.**”*

It is the Holy Spirit who shows us the very purpose for our physical lives.

He opens up the mind of God, that is recorded in the Christian Bible.

Exodus 14:21-22 [NIV] *“**Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.**”*

It was a supernatural act of God that opened up a new way of life to them, the other side of Red Sea.

But it took faith to walk several miles between two high walls of water.

Only if we are looking straight ahead to where God is leading us, as the Israelites should have done, do we see the freedom and tremendous opportunity that God has opened up for each of us personally.

Freedom from the penalty of sin.

Freedom from the slavery to sin.

Freedom from the slavery to our human nature [Satan's nature].

Freedom from the limitations of the physical human body.

An opportunity to receive a reward that is beyond price, eternal life in God's presence.

5. What is our part in this plan of God?

a) Realise that we cannot hide our feelings from God

Psalms 139:1-6 [NIV] *“O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. **Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.** You hem me in, behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.”*

God knows us better than we do ourselves.

Psalms 139:7-12 [NIV] *“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,” even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.”*

There is **no** place where we are out of reach of the Holy Spirit to guide and empower us.

Psalms 139:13-16 [NIV] *“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. **When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”***

God knows just how many days of physical life He has allotted to each of us.

Even before our conception God had plans for all of our life.

We have only to choose to yield to His Plan for us and follow the lead of the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 4:13 [NIV] *“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”*

We **cannot** hide any dissatisfaction we have as to our position in life.

We do **not** have to be anywhere else or doing any other job to know and use this opportunity that God has given us to its full value.

Philippians 4:11-13, 19 [NIV] *“I am not saying this because I am in need, **for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.** I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. **I can do everything through him who gives me strength.**” ... “And my **God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.**”*

We need to be content with the position in which God called us.

We **don't** have to be a Christian minister to fulfil the opportunity that God has given us.

James 3:1 [NIV] *“Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.”*

In fact in many ways you are better off **not** being a Christian minister or teacher.

I know that I now, even as a retired pastor, am accountable to God for my own spiritual life.

But also in measure for the spiritual lives of all I have ministered God's Word to.

This is a very daunting thought, knowing the tens of thousands of people who have visited this website and downloaded vast amounts of material to study.

b) Realise that we must act now

Romans 13:11-14 [NIV] *“And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because **our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed**. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. **Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.**”*

Time is **not** on our side, there is far too little left for any of us, this physical life is very short.

Galatians 6:7-8 [NIV] *“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”*

Now is the time to repent and cry out to God for forgiveness, **not** having grasped with both hands this wonderful opportunity He has offered us.

Romans 8:28-30 [NIV] *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”*

Those called of God to become Christians now will be among the first born into the created family of God by a resurrection or a transformation at Christ's return.

1 Corinthians 15:19-23 [NIV] *“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. **But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.**”*

The physical resurrection of Jesus Christ, the human Son of Man, was the firstfruits of many other human beings.

Revelation 20:6 [NIV] *“Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.”*

To be part of the first resurrection, that takes place at Christ's return, is a great added blessing and opportunity to work alongside our Saviour Jesus Christ to bring millions more to repentance and salvation.

Isn't this the reward that was offered to those who used the talents given to them described in the parable Jesus Christ gave to His disciples?

Luke 19:11-27 [NIV] *“While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. He said: “A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back.’ “But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We don’t want this man to be our king.’ “He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it. “The first one came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned ten more.’ “**“Well done, my good servant!”** his master replied. **‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’** “The second came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned five more.’ “His master answered, **‘You take charge of five cities.’** “Then another servant came and said, ‘Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.’ “His master replied, ‘I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? Why then didn’t you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?’ “Then he said to those standing by, ‘Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.’ “‘Sir,’ they said, ‘he already has ten!’ “He replied, ‘I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away. But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be a king over them, bring them here and kill them in front of me.’”*

Rulership over cities was their reward for using the opportunity given to them.

But also note those who rejected what their master had given them, rejected this opportunity, were classified as enemies of God and their reward was death.

God’s Word is for real, God means what He has said in His Word, the Christian Bible.

God is Sovereign as the Creator God and has total power over all this creation and that includes every human being.

Deuteronomy 32:39 [NIV] *“See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. **I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no-one can deliver out of my hand.**”*

This is the right of the one and only Creator God.

1 Samuel 2:6 [NIV] *“The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up.”*

We need to take this seriously even if we don't like the thought.

Hosea 6:1 [NIV] *“Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds.”*

God will use painful trials in our lives to cause us to use the opportunity He has given us, to receive the gift of eternal life.

Hebrews 12:1-8 [NIV] *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: **“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes***

*you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”
Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.”*

Because God loves each of us so much He will go to every extreme to encourage us to grasp the opportunity He is placing before us.

Respond to this expression of God’s love and you will never regret it.