

ONE

A MISSION FULL OF OPPORTUNITIES



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

It's hard to know the needs of the heart when we first meet people. I remember when a grocery store checker insulted my grandmother because she was old. I was so offended. My grandmother only smiled and thanked her for helping us. Later, she told me, "I could have been rude to her, but I think she's probably hurting inside." The deepest needs of people are mostly spiritual. In today's passage, for example, a beggar at the temple asked Peter and John for money. Instead of money, they met the true need of the beggar's heart, one he didn't even know he had.

THE POINT

We _____ daily with people who need Christ.

The book of Acts is all about the beginning of the church. The book opens with the call of Christ to His disciples to carry the gospel into all the world. We see the disciples empowered for that work through the Holy Spirit. In story after story, God used His followers to spread the good news of Christ. Here, at the beginning of Acts 3, two of Jesus's apostles, Peter and John, were on their way to pray in the temple when they encountered a lame beggar calling out to them. Whether Peter and John had seen him there before is unknown.

Acts 3:1-4 ¹ Now Peter and John were going up to the temple for the time of prayer at three in the afternoon. ² A man who was lame from birth was being carried there. He was placed each day at the temple gate called Beautiful, so that he could beg from those entering the temple. ³ When he saw Peter and John about to enter the temple, he asked for money. ⁴ Peter, along with John, looked straight at him and said, "Look at us."

1) See the opportunities your _____ with people provide.

As the story opens, a lame man sat beside the temple gate asking for charity. Prayer time attracted worshipers, and some would drop a coin for this man as they hurried past. They rarely spoke to him and seldom looked at him. Peter and John were on their way to the temple to pray. The lame man asked them for a coin or two. How would Peter and John respond to this divine interruption in their plans? Would they simply continue on their way? As with many encounters in life, the beggar wanted something from them. They were already diligently serving the Lord and faithfully tending to their congregation. Thinking they were doing enough, they may have been tempted to ignore the beggar, maybe even pretend they didn't see him, but that's not what they did. They "looked straight at

him and said, ‘Look at us!’” (v. 4). They gave the man their attention. More than that, they engaged him.

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 do have, I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, 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 and started to walk, and he entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God.

2) Share the love of _____ through those encounters.

When the man looked at Peter and John, maybe he thought he might receive some significant gift. We know that he expected “to get something” (v. 5). But Peter saw beyond his outstretched hand to the real need of his heart. He gave the man the strength of his legs. More than that, he gave the man Jesus. The healing came directly from God’s Son. The man’s legs were healed, but something also happened in his soul. He used his sudden strength to leap and praise God. Often, the deepest need of the people we encounter isn’t physical but the need for hope. That comes from Christ.

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. So they were filled with awe and astonishment at what had happened to him.

3) One encounter often leads to more _____ to share Christ.

The orderliness of the temple prayer time was interrupted by a growing clamor of people wanting to see the miracle that had happened. Right before their eyes, the lame beggar they all knew went from an invalid to standing upright, from total dependency to independence, from hopelessness to hope fulfilled, from begging to praising. Who or what was responsible for such an extraordinary transformation? What started as a meaningful encounter with one suffering, hopeless man quickly spread to an opportunity for Peter and John to bear witness to Jesus and for many to hear of His power and love.

ENGAGE

In the margin or on a separate sheet of paper, draw a map of your typical day, noting the places where you intersect with others (in person or remotely). Trace this route with your finger as you pray for opportunities to share Christ with those you encounter.

LIVE IT OUT

What actions will you take in response to today's study?

- **Look around.** Make an intentional effort to pay attention to the people around you. Smile. Say hi. Offer assistance. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you see the real needs of the people you encounter.
- **Meet needs.** God may not give you the opportunity to heal a lame man, but look for opportunities to listen to a hurting heart, buy diapers for a needy mom, or treat someone to a meal.
- **Make time.** Peter and John stopped what they were doing to heal the lame man. Leave fifteen minutes early wherever you're going this week. Ask God to use this extra time for His purposes. Prepare to be surprised by what He has planned.

TALK IT OUT

Want to go a step further? Gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender. Read Acts 3:1-10, then use the following summary and questions for a deeper discussion.

Peter and John were on their way to pray. They saw a lame man on the side of the road. Rather than passing by, they engaged with him. The man wanted money, but the apostles gave him so much more. They met his greatest physical need by healing him. But they also introduced him to Jesus, who met the man's deepest spiritual need. People recognized the man and knew he'd been lame his whole life. The news spread quickly, and a crowd gathered to see this miracle God had performed through Peter and John.

Every day, we pass hurting and needy people as we hurry to work, class, or an evening out. Passing by without a thought is way too easy. We need to retune our hearts to see people as Jesus does.

- ? **Why is it so easy to ignore the hurting people we encounter?**
- ? **In what ways do the needs of others provide an opportunity for ministry?**
- ? **How can we take the initiative to meet needs and share the gospel?**

DAY 1: The apostles truly saw the lame man.**Read Acts 3:1-4.**

Day by day, someone picked up and carried the lame man to the temple. He wasn't going to worship but to beg. In fact, he wasn't allowed into the temple to worship. He begged to get enough money to survive another day. We don't know who was bringing him to the temple, but it seems odd. They cared enough to help him beg but not enough to invite him to their table. Day by day, people walked into the temple for prayer, sacrifices, or other temple business. They walked past the man. Maybe they dropped a coin or two for him. The lame man had likely given up hope long ago that he would ever be anything but a cripple.

Peter and John were walking to the temple for the third prayer time of the day. When the two disciples saw the lame man begging, they stopped. They "looked straight at him" (v. 4). The lame man wasn't used to people making eye contact. Some people gave him a passing glance, perhaps flipped him a coin, and moved along.

My freshman sociology professor said we often treat people as "non-persons." At first, I didn't believe him. Then, he asked us to consider how we see the person who sells us movie tickets. Do we notice enough about him or her that five minutes later we could give a description? I'm afraid he was right; I do treat people like non-persons at times. We all want to be seen. We all want to be heard. Peter and John wanted to be seen and heard because they had something important to say. They also wanted the lame man to know that they saw him—truly saw him.

When our lives intersect with others, we have a choice. We can choose to ignore them, carry out our business with them, and move along. Or, we can choose to see and hear them. Peter and John saw the lame man with more than human eyes. They saw him as Jesus would have seen him.

- 🕒 **Consider the people you encounter in your daily routine—cashiers, servers, delivery people, and so on. Do you treat them as people of value? Ask Jesus to help you see people with His eyes.**

DAY 2: The lame man got a hand up, not a handout.

Read Acts 3:4-6.

Peter and John were fishermen. Actually, they were former fishermen. In the ancient world, you didn't get rich as an apostle or as a fisherman. Peter wasn't exaggerating when he said he didn't "have silver or gold" (v. 6). He probably didn't have copper either. "What I do have, I give you." What did Peter have to give the man? Peter possessed a kind of wealth that went far beyond material possessions. Peter possessed the presence of Christ.

When Peter spoke healing over the lame man, he did it "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" (v. 6). The lame man had heard about Jesus. He knew Jesus was a Jewish teacher and healer. The man had heard the story of His crucifixion and maybe even the unbelievable story of His resurrection. He knew some believed Jesus to be the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. The name meant something. Perhaps it stirred hope.

It's interesting that Peter mentioned Jesus was from Nazareth. The question is asked in John 1:46, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Jews had low regard for the town. Some cited Jesus's background in Nazareth as evidence that He couldn't be the prophesied Messiah. Maybe that was Peter's point. Maybe this lame man who was so looked down on by his own people, unwelcome in the Jewish temple, could find hope and healing from a Savior who was also despised and rejected.

Peter's gift to the lame man was so much greater than the coins the man requested. The man had always been the cripple, cursed from birth with feet and ankles that wouldn't work. From that day forward, he would be the man made whole by Jesus.

- 🕒 **Reflect on a time when God provided something unexpected—perhaps not what you asked for but exactly what you needed. Write a prayer of thanksgiving to God in the margin.**

DAY 3: The lame man was healed in Jesus's name.

Read Acts 3:6-8.

Peter pronounced healing on the lame man in the name of Jesus. Oddly, it doesn't seem as if the man was healed when the words were spoken. Instead, the healing seemed to take place at the touch of Peter. Peter took the man's right hand and lifted him to his feet. We can't be sure, but perhaps this makes sense. Over and over, Jesus healed by His touch. He could have simply spoken a word of healing, but most often, Jesus healed by touch—a blind man's eyes, the skin of a leper, the tongue of a person who couldn't speak. There's something powerful about the human touch. Perhaps that's why Luke included this detail.

Suddenly, the man's feet and ankles were strengthened. He probably moved gingerly at first and then began stomping his feet. He could walk. He'd never walked before, and now he could! I wonder how long Peter held his hand. The man had never learned to balance on two legs as most toddlers do. Maybe Peter held his hand long enough for the man to get the feel of walking. But before long, he was leaping!

Verse 8 tells us the man "entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God." There was no prohibition of the lame entering the temple in the Levitical law.¹ Even so, Jewish law at the time didn't permit the entrance of the blind or lame. Because this man was a blind beggar, the Mishnah restricted him from coming into the temple. Imagine: The man had been sitting at the temple gates for years, but had never been able to go inside. It's no wonder he was leaping and praising God.

🕒 Who can you take by the hand today? Share a meal or cup of coffee with someone who needs encouragement and a message of hope.

1. Davidson Razafiarivony, "Exclusion of the Blind and Lame from the Temple and the Indignation of the Religious Leaders in Matt 21:12-15," *The American Journal of Biblical Theology*, Volume 19(34) August 26, 2018, www.biblicaltheology.com/Research/RazafiarivonyD04.pdf.

DAY 4: God's work in our lives provides opportunities to make much of Jesus.

Read Acts 3:7-9.

As Peter took the hand of the lame man, Luke tells us the man “jumped up” (v. 8). He had this sudden realization that his legs worked like they were supposed to, and he jumped to his feet for the first time in his life. Then he “started to walk.”

Peter and John were on their way to the temple when they encountered the lame beggar. After seeing the man healed, the disciples continued toward the temple. They may have been meeting other followers of Jesus for prayer, teaching, and sharing the gospel.

The man the disciples healed could have gone to find his family to show them the miracle he had received. He could have thanked the disciples and left, anxious to begin this new chapter in his life. Instead, he stayed with them, entered the temple, and kept praising God for what had happened to him. His gratitude toward the disciples was big, only eclipsed by his wonder at what God had done for him.

The man's actions likely caused a bit of a spectacle. His jumping and praising may have disrupted the normal activities of the temple. No doubt, the people around him noticed his joy. He was probably too loud and too showy, but his excitement couldn't be contained. Peter and John had witnessed countless miracles during Jesus's ministry, but I imagine the joy of seeing someone healed in His name—so visibly transformed by God's power—never lost its wonder.

Miracles are opportunities to make much of Jesus. And now, Peter and John had the attention of “all the people” (v. 9).

? What are some ways you can use God's work in your life to make much of Jesus? Journal your thoughts in the margin.

DAY 5: Sharing Christ with one can open the door for others.

Read Acts 3:9-11.

The lame man had been begging in the same place for years. People who came to the temple saw him often. They might not have known his name, but they recognized his face. Perhaps his story had been passed along from person to person. When they saw him praising God in the temple, their view changed. They were accustomed to seeing the top of his head and his outstretched hand. Now, they “saw him walking and praising God” (v. 9) with a heart and eyes full of joy.

Solomon’s Colonnade was a covered walkway in the temple often used for public gatherings of Jews. Since the early church was mostly Jewish, they used the colonnade for their early meetings. Peter and John led the man to the colonnade, where they likely connected with other Christians. Word traveled throughout the temple complex that the lame beggar was made whole. The Bible says the people “were filled with awe and astonishment” (v. 10). Everyone wanted to see for themselves. As word spread, the people rushed to where the man stood.

Seeing the power of God at work in the lame man sparked a fire in the crowd. Suddenly, they were curious about what had happened and anxious to hear more. An openness to the gospel of Christ seized the people. They were hungry and ready to listen. Peter and John saw the opportunity to tell the story of Jesus. Often, speaking the name of Christ to one person can open the door for others to hear as well.

- 🕒 **Get together with a Christian friend and talk about ways God has changed your lives. Pray together, asking Him for boldness to share your story so others might want to “run toward” you and learn more.**

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How, then, can they call on him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about him? And how can they hear without a preacher?

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Romans 10:14