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*“The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2)*

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## MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

What does Jesus tell us about noticing the opportunities we have in front of us? We're quick to blame an undesired outcome on a single moment. How many times have we declared that a ballgame would have had an entirely different outcome if it wasn't for one blown call by a referee or a single missed free throw? Have we ever thought if a teacher grading our exam would have given us just one more point on a complex discussion question, we would have had the grade we wanted? We assign blame to these single moments, but what about all of the other mistakes made leading up to them? When we look back, there were plenty of missed free throws from earlier in

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the game or simpler exam questions we answered incorrectly. We tend not to bring up these mistakes, but these contributed just as much to the undesired outcome about which we're unhappy. In fact, if not for these mistakes that added up along the way, that one blown call or arguable item grade wouldn't matter. When we are honest with ourselves, there were plenty of opportunities for success; we just missed these opportunities. After all, it's far more convenient to blame others than to acknowledge the missed opportunities we had. However, as we brush these missed opportunities aside, they begin to accumulate. Before we know it, we can find ourselves looking back at periods of our life as a mass of missed opportunities. As Christians, we have missed opportunities in God's word; there are times we can be studying and learning it for ourselves or spreading it to others. We miss opportunities to spend time in prayer. We miss opportunities to help others, through visiting and talking with someone in our congregation or communities who needs it in a time of poor health or loneliness. We miss opportunities to learn about others, both within our Christian family and from those who could potentially be added; there are times to understand their struggles and build a relationship with them. There are plenty of calls for help or need that those around us give, but we miss the clues because we're too preoccupied or distracted elsewhere.

In the parable of talents, a denomination of money at the time (Matthew 25), Jesus tells of a man traveling and thus giving his servants care of his goods. One servant gets five talents, invests, and makes five more talents in profit. Another servant gets two talents, invests, and makes two more talents in profit. Finally, a third servant gets one talent, stores it away, does nothing, and makes no profit. Once the master returns, he commends the two servants who made profit, noting to both "*...Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord*" (Mat. 25:21, 23). Now, towards the unprofitable servant:

*Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*  
(Mat. 25:24-30)

The unprofitable servant contradicts himself in his excuse. He claims that his master is such a good businessman but at the same time could not afford to lose this talent. The master responds by telling the servant that's a poor excuse; the servant is just lazy. There are at least two points Jesus makes in this parable that are about our resources - time, energy, and money: 1) As much as we're responsible for our actions, we're responsible for our inaction (missed opportunities), and 2) We have to consider how we spend our resources. Time is potentially the most unique of our resources. Although time, energy, and money are all temporary, our money and energy can fluctuate over our lives. Sometimes we can find ways to boost our money and energy for a period. However, time is fixed and the hours are not transferable; we can't save two hours today to have twenty-six tomorrow.

What can we learn from the two profitable servants? They invested and gained from their investment. They created a positive cycle for themselves and so can we. Taking advantage of opportunities and gaining from them makes it easier to gain

more from other opportunities in the future. For example, taking advantage of an opportunity to learn more from God's word and gain knowledge will make it easier to gain more knowledge in the future. Having one conversation with someone with whom you're trying to build a relationship makes more conversations in the future more likely. When we miss opportunities, it's not because the opportunities are not there. We're not in opportunity poverty; we're just poor investors and managers of opportunities.

If the opportunities are there, how do we miss them so often? As the unprofitable servant mismanaged his resources, what are we mismanaging to miss these opportunities? Although we cannot make an exhaustive list of all the reasons why, it seems we miss many of these opportunities because we don't listen, we misallocate the time we do have, and we're increasingly not observant of what's happening around us. Although we're familiar with James' call to prioritize listening over speaking, "*Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:*" (Jas. 1:19), we often fail to do so when we get into the routine of daily life. Some of us seem as if we just can't stop ourselves from talking, and to James' point, if we're talking then we're not listening. We can imagine a noisy classroom of children or teenagers talking and missing information being relayed to them. I made the mistake of thinking people grew out of such behavior but have come to discover that the noisy classrooms just turn into noisy rooms of overlapping talking adults. We miss so many opportunities because we're not ready to listen (swift to hear). Family, friends, co-workers, and even strangers may be telling us something that would open some doors to these opportunities. They may reveal a way we can help them, they may be about to say something that would help us learn about them to build a relationship, and they may be about to cry for help. We will miss all of those clues if we interrupt them. We will miss these opportunities if we aren't listening but instead waiting our turn to talk.

We're quick to acknowledge our time is finite and limited, and there thus may be no more convenient excuse for missing opportunities than that we did not have time. However, if we look back at the time we did have, did we spend every minute wisely? A careful examination of the way we spent our time will reveal plenty of time we could have seen, heard, and seized the opportunities around us only to find we spent those moments with our favorite distractions. These distractions come in the form of the television, hobbies, and more often than not in today's life, scrolling through a cell phone. Family and friends will note how they never really spend time together or have deep conversations, and yet the opportunities are plentiful; they just spend those moments glued to their phone, too distracted to notice the opportunities. Despite the limited time we have, it's not a lack of time with which we struggle. We fail to prioritize how we spend and invest the time we do have.

In the second part of this article, we will see how we miss opportunities by not being observant of the situation or environment around us.

BEN

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## WHY DOES GOD PERMIT EVIL TO PREVAIL?

God created man with the ability to choose and determine his own course to follow. If this were not so, man would be no more than a robot programmed to accomplish certain functions. This is clearly seen in the fact that Adam and Eve were allowed to make a decision as to whether they would or would not eat of the forbidden fruit.

Angels are also created beings, although not with bodies as we have, and they exist in the presence of God rather than being consigned to the earth. Satan, being an angel, possessed the freedom and ability to do right or wrong. He chose to rebel against God (Rev. 12:7-12).

*And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left*

*their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. (Jude 1:6)*

This characteristic of God giving a choice is also seen in His dealing with Israel.

*Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known. (Deu. 11:26-28)*

*And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. (Jos. 24:15)*

#### CONSIDER GOD'S USE OF THE RESULT OF EVIL, WRONG, OR HARM

Consider the wrong suffered by Esau when Jacob tricked Isaac out of Esau's blessing. God accepted Jacob, who was involved in the trickery. Esau's selling his birthright earlier indicated his unworthiness to possess it (Gen. 25:29-34; Heb. 12:14-17). God did not cause, encourage, or endorse evil, but He did make use of evil which was done by Esau as an instrument for His purposes.

Rulers, even evil and ruthless rulers, are referred to as "God's ministers" (Rom. 13:6). "*And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings:*" (Dan 2:21a).

These men are in positions where they can execute authority and wield power. Even though they may not even acknowledge God, He can so use their actions to serve His purposes. This might well have been to chastise His people or bring to an end an oppressive force.

God could use other means to achieve his purpose, but perhaps He sometimes may find it best to use natural, even harmful means to prove or to provide for His servants.

Abraham was asked to sacrifice Isaac.

*By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure. (Heb. 11:17-19; also Gen 22:1-13).*

God's foreknowledge and provision for Israel:

*And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. (Gen. 15:13-16)*

But carefully note that God did not have the Amorites dispossessed until they were come to full iniquity.

Joseph and his brothers: “*But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive*” (Gen. 50:20).

## CONCLUSION

It is not a question of God causing or agreeing with evil, but rather a matter of God permitting certain things which He could have prevented. If God intervened in such matters, however, then He would not have allowed man to exercise his freedom of choice. God then could be considered responsible for what happened to man, thus violating the principle of man being responsible for his own actions.

HARRY COBB  
Deceased

## SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. What was God to give Abraham as an everlasting possession?
2. Who was afflicted with leprosy for speaking out against Moses?
3. What did Joseph want to do when he discovered Mary was pregnant?
4. What did the disciples do when people brought their young children to Jesus?
5. During what traumatic event did the apostle Paul take bread and give thanks?

...ANSWERS NEXT MONTH

And remember last month's questions?

1. How does the Bible describe the location of the Garden of Eden? IN THE EAST (Gen. 2:8)
2. What was the name of Ruth's great-grandson? DAVID (Ruth 4:22)
3. In which book of the Bible do we find Nebuchadnezzar's golden image? DANIEL (Dan. 2:31-36)
4. Who did Mary Magdalene suppose Jesus to be at first after the resurrection? THE GARDENER (John 20:15)
5. Who said, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things"? PAUL (1 Cor. 1:1-2; 13:11)

THE HARVESTER is a monthly publication intended to encourage all men everywhere to become laborers into God's harvest (Luke 10:2). This paper is mailed free of charge to anyone who wishes to receive it. Please submit name, address, address changes and all correspondence to:

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