

## I. Overcoming Fear and Building Confidence

There are so many good practical lessons along with the great doctrinal lessons in the Book of Proverbs. Last week, no matter what level we are on in our spiritual growth, there was something for all of us there. That is one of the things I really appreciate about the Book of Proverbs: getting to the place where you overcome the fears in your life.

Fear, as we talked about last week, is fearing things that really cannot hurt you. But the devil uses those things because of our ignorance and our inability to trust in the Word of God and its principles to hinder us. I have heard it said all my life that danger is real. There are some things in life that are really dangerous; danger is a reality of life. But fear is always a choice in life. You want to respect the danger, but you realize that fear is what we allow into our lives. In a Christian's life, it has no place for those of us who really believe and love the Lord.

We talked about having confidence in God last time. The number one thing that befalls so many of God's people is that they lack that confidence in their own life. That confidence only comes from the investment of the Word of God in your life, giving us the understanding, wisdom, and discretion that we have been talking about. It is the ability to see circumstances in your life as they really are, not as they appear.

Fear, many times, and our lack of confidence will take a scenario and make it much worse than it is, or when it is really bad, make it seem menial where you do not think it really is. It is the ability to take all those parts, all those components of any issue, to break them down, look at them, and understand them. Then, through the Word of God, see the snares and pitfalls that the devil has laid for you. It is the ability to walk and navigate through a world of darkness with the light of God's Word. That is what we focused on last week.

## II. The Principle of Withholding Not Good

Today, we will look at another great practical concept in Proverbs 3:27-30. This will be our eleventh set of paragraph marks.

*Proverbs 3:27-30*

*Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.*

*Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to morrow I will give thee; when thou hast it by thee.*

*Devise not evil against thy neighbour, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee.*

Father, we thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus, and we do love You. We pray today that You will help us take this great set of verses and glean out of it the principles for life that will help us be better for You. We love You today and we thank You for all that You do for us. Thank

You for the folks that have made their way out today. Lord, we thank You now and praise You in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.

### III. Making Good Investments for the Lord

We have been talking about making good investments. That has been the overall theme of what we have been looking at the last four or five weeks. We talked about the great example in Luke 19, how the Lord gave three men an equal pound. Each man got a pound, and they were to take that pound. The Lord went away, and when He came back, He wanted to see what they had done with it.

We made that analogy: that is exactly what God has done for us. He has given us the same abilities, the same grace, the same salvation. We all have everything that anybody else has that we got from God. But it is the investment that we make with it. Some people make no investments, some people make some investments, and some people make major investments. We have been talking about not only making an investment but bringing back a return for the Lord. That is what the whole story in Luke 19 was about. When the Lord came back, the one guy who had a pound brought back ten pounds; he made a return for the Lord.

We are not talking about monetary things here, even though that is the example used. We are talking about it in a spiritual sense. When God saves you, God puts in you the power of God through the Holy Spirit of God. He expects us to do something with that. A man or a woman who invests their life in the Word of God, and we are going to look at an example of that today, will bring a good return for the Lord. In other words, you will do something with what God gave you, and the reason He gave it to you was so you would do something with it. Today, we will see another great example of that.

### IV. The Ministry Is People

Verse 27 sets up a great Christian New Testament principle for all of us in our investment with people. This practical approach of this verse probably helped me more than any other principle as far as people in the ministry. The ministry is people.

*Proverbs 3:27*

*Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.*

This would make a great Christmas message because Christmas is about giving. However, real Bible-based Christianity is responding to needs all year long. It is not just at a time of year that we want to soothe our conscience and forget about it the rest of the year. This principle fits into the theme of Christmas, but I am taking it one step beyond that.

As I have said, the ministry is people. People need to be the lifeblood of this church. It always has been since we started. We started out very small, and God has blessed us and given us a great host of people. It is all because other people have cared about other people. I have watched situations over the years where you have stepped up and done things for each other, and it is a

tremendous quality to have. It is a great thing for me to see as your pastor. People need to be our lives. We take them where we find them and help them get to where they need to be.

You cannot help everybody. I wish you could; in a perfect world, it would be a great thing. You simply cannot. When people come to this church, some stay and some do not. Some come in and do not like it. Some come in and say, "I have been looking for this all my life." People come and people go; it is just the nature of it.

I think probably the hardest thing, as we all have feelings and emotions, is to imagine being a professional baseball or football player. Those guys get on a team, give it everything, work out all day long, fight out there on the field, and are loyal. If somebody comes along, especially in baseball, that the team owner thinks is going to be better for their team than you, you get traded. They do not come in and say, "You have done a really good job, but we are going to trade you." They just trade you. You find out about it in the newspapers many times. Football players are the same way. You can give it your all and be absolutely committed to the team, and yet at the end of the season, if they get a new coach or decide to go another way and want to bring somebody else, it does not matter how good you are, you are gone. That has to bother these guys to some degree. But they all say the same thing: "It is the nature of the business because they are there to win games."

People come and people go. People love it, people do not love it. But the bottom line at the end of the day, it is the nature of the ministry. You are not going to be able to help everybody. You all know that you cannot help people who are not willing to help themselves. They have to start wanting to do what they need to do. Our job is to meet their needs on the level of where they are at. It is crucial for us who have people in our lives who really want to make a difference in their life that we are there for them when they have that need.

I have always looked at the ministry and people in a threefold concept:

1. We have to make a decision: "I am going to help people." Life is about choices. You recognize what God has done for you. You recognize that you need to give something back, and you make the decision to help people.
2. God gives you a desire. That desire God takes and develops into a burden. The burden God gives you is for other people.
3. Once you get that, you have to have a good dose of determination. That is the grace that God gives you to help people. It is easy to say, "I am going to decide I am going to work with people and help people." But trying to help people without a burden for people, you will lose your interest very quickly because people will not always turn out the way you want them to, and you will get discouraged. It is a burden that you have for people that keeps you, because you realize that you are not doing it for them, even though you are. You are doing it because God did it for you. That gives you the determination to help people.

I think the greatest example of that is General William Booth, who lived back in the 1800s and died in 1912. Most people know him today as the founder of the Salvation Army. The Salvation Army back then was a great organization. He was an evangelist and a preacher, and he started in England. He was born in 1829, so he fits right into that Philadelphian church age. When you look

at his life, you see that at some point, he made a decision to help people. Then, after he made that decision, God gave him the burden. Then God gave him the determination and the desire to carry it all the way through.

Every year at Christmas, he would meet and talk with all the delegates and all the people of the Salvation Army. By 1912, it was quite incredible; they were everywhere. By the 1930s, there were missionaries in 55 countries around the world. It is incredible. Over three million derelicts, over three million drunks, over three million drug addicts made a profession of faith under his ministry because he had a burden. That burden came because he made a decision, and then God took it and gave him the determination to see it through.

He died Christmas night in 1912. As was his custom every Christmas Eve, he would address all of his people. By then, they had radio, and he was in his sick bed and could hardly get out of bed. He died later on that night. But all over the country, the Salvation Army groups all over the world had tuned in to hear William Booth's Christmas message. He was a great preacher and evangelist, but on that night, he was so weak and sick. As thousands and thousands of people gathered around the radios all around the world to listen to the man who started the organization responsible for so many people coming to Christ, one word was all he had the energy to say. It resonated over those airwaves and carried on. The word he simply said that night before he died, this message at Christmas to all of his workers, was simply the word he lived by all of his life: "Others." His whole life was dedicated to others.

## V. The Power in Your Hand

There came a time in his life when he made the decision, God gave him the burden, and then God gave him the determination to do it. By the 1930s, they were in 55 countries; they were everywhere. He had in his hand the power to do good. When you get saved, it is your hands in the Bible that you do the work of God with. So you find a lot of references to the hand.

I think the greatest example of this is Moses in the Bible. Moses reminds me so much of so many of you. Moses is a guy who, when he met God, God had a job for him to do. Moses recognized the job, but his biggest problem was a lack of confidence in himself. He meets God on Mount Sinai at that burning bush. God says, "I want you to go back to Egypt." This is where our little phrase comes from: "He was beating around the bush." That bush was telling him, God speaking through that burning bush, that He wanted him to go back to Pharaoh and back to Egypt and bring the people out. But he lacked the confidence. He was like so many of you when you first got saved; he had a confidence issue. He was afraid of Pharaoh. Why should he not have been? He had lived in Egypt, he was raised in Egypt, he knew the power of Pharaoh, and he was afraid.

I will never forget in that story when he starts to alibi to God, and he says to God what so many of God's people say when they are fearful and do not have confidence. He said to God, "How am I ever going to talk to Pharaoh? How is Pharaoh ever going to listen to me? How am I ever going to get him to do what You want him to do?" God said to him, "Moses, what do you have in your hand?" Moses looked down in his hand, and he had a shepherd's rod. God said, "Moses, I will just use what you have in your hand." If you study through the Bible, it was that shepherd's rod

that he turned the waters to blood with. It was that shepherd's rod that he brought the plagues down. It was the shepherd's rod that he brought the fiery serpents and the fire. All the miracles that he did that turned the heart of Pharaoh and finally got God's people let go were simply what he had in his hand.

When you first get saved, all God wants to take is what you have in your hand. All God wants from you is what you have right now in your hand. He is not going to ask you to step up by faith and to do some great thing. He just wants you to start with what you have in your hand. How many times have I seen you just let God use you where you are at right now?

I think a great example that we could all relate to is Gary Potter. Gary Potter is one of the most giving guys I have ever met in my life. He goes down to Restart four or five times a week. He goes everywhere. If you are stuck on the road someplace, call him, and he will come and get you. He has a truck in his hand. He is the greatest example I see of somebody who unselfishly, if you are in a jam, if you are in a fix, whatever you need, he will come and get you. It is never too much for him. He is where he is at, and God has blessed him the way He has, simply because he just let God use what he had in his hand, and God took it from there. That is what God wants. He wants you to start with what you have in your hand. If you are giving that, He will take care of the rest.

Verse 27 says, "Withhold not good when it is in the power of your hand to give it." God's power is in your hand. That is where it starts. But it only starts when you are willing to take what you have in your hand and let God use it for others.

## VI. Understanding Salvation and Meeting Needs

This proverb sets the foundation for the New Testament principle of our ministry here in our church, and really any ministry. The teaching is quite clear: if you have an opportunity to help someone, do it. It is your Christian duty within the structure of the New Testament local church, of course.

To me, nothing shows our understanding of our salvation and the grace that brought it down to man more than this. Nothing shows me in our lives, in this church, that you do not understand this and what God did when He saved you greater than this. All of us fit into that category. There was a time when we had a need. There was a time when God saw our need, and God had it in His hand to give us what we needed. God took the opportunity to help me in my need. I do not know how much more basic and simple it can get than that.

Yet, in spite of that, it never ceases to amaze me how so many of God's people will not live the example of Christ. Christ came down and met our needs where we were at. Some seem to be absolutely oblivious to the needs around them. He came down, and sometimes God's people have to come down off their throne, off the high horse that they are living on, up in a lifestyle where they get into an ozone layer that they do not understand what is going on down on earth. He came down to us, and we have to go down to people. It is just that simple.

Many churches today get to the point where they look like what heaven must look like. They get into an atmosphere that they do not even understand the reality that all around them people are dying, hurting, and needing. Normally, I would go into the Bible and give you some great examples of men and women who do this, and the Bible is filled with them. But today, and I am proud to say, I do not have to do that. I do not have to go to the Bible to get the examples because there are plenty of examples right here in our own church with our people who have caught this great concept of "others."

There are great pastoral principles in the Bible. One of them is found in Proverbs 27:23.

*Proverbs 27:23*

*Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds.*

A good pastor will always know where his church is at for the most part. A couple of things you look for, but one of the greatest indicators, is how people minister to each other, how they help each other, how they give to each other. Very little goes on around me in this church that I do not see, and much of it goes on behind the scenes. What some of you do for each other is incredible.

I know of several families who have kids, and they saw other needy families that had needs. They went through their kids and asked them, "Kids, would you all take one less Christmas present this year so we could give something to this family who does not have anything?" All the kids said yes. I think that is one of the greatest lessons you can give to your kids. In their formative years, that is one of the single greatest things you can do to show them that we are thankful for what we have, and we want to enjoy what we have, but never get so caught up in what we have that we forget there are others out there who are less fortunate. That is a lesson that is invaluable to your kids.

I see behind the scenes what some of you do. I look at the Christmas party last week at Restart and how the prayer groups went out and bought for the singles, and how we took care of all the kids down there that would not have had anything for Christmas. I know it expands way beyond that. What I said earlier, for us, even though it was a great time for Christmas, and John dresses up like Santa Claus, and we all wrap him up, and Jamie gets all the stuff organized, and everybody works it out in the games you had, and all the people that came down were a part of that. That was at Christmas, but we do those same things all year round.

I look at the food you bring in. I saw a woman a couple of months ago who has a couple of little kids, and she struggles just to keep her head above water. She struggles with things in her life, just taking care of the pay and the bills. She does not have a real good job, and she has some kids to take care of. Yet, I watched her one day when we were in a jam for food down there. She brought in a whole stack of hamburgers and a whole stack of hot dogs. I do not think for a moment she shoplifted them. That is what I am talking about. Then you have other people who are oblivious to that; they do not see that need. But I am telling you, those kinds of things, I never miss them. The faithfulness every other week of feeding four or five hundred people that would not have anything to eat. Giving up your Sundays, giving up your time to give to others in the cold and the rain and the heat, and never complain.

I look at Turnaround, the mentee program we have. I got a letter today; it was in a Christmas card from down there in Richard. I want to read you something out of it here because I think it is incredible. Honestly, I think that the Turnaround program is developing into one of the best things that God ever gave us. It really is. So much goes on down there that nobody ever sees. Every other week, there is a team down there sorting the clothes and going through it so they do not have to come in and do it on Monday. The food you bring in, those girls and guys go down and restock that and keep the clothes, separate all the clothes, put all the stuff up, get them all sized up so when they come in on Monday morning, they can get right to the job. There are no TV cameras down there. No Channel 9 has put that on the news tonight, looking at what you are doing at Christmas. But God is recording it all.

The mentoring program is unique in itself. It is a situation where most of these people have had problems in their lives, and most of these people, they weed them out, and they want to get people who really want a fresh start in life. They simply want somebody of a quality of life to be a mentor to them. We have seen that in every one that you have got, and I know you have to go through four or five to get one that is good. We have to do the same thing in church; it is just the way it is today. You go through four or five people to find one. But how many guys have we seen that have gotten saved out of that program? That you have enough influence to bring them to church, and they come to church, and they want to be part of church. We see them here all the time. I have the utmost respect for those guys and want to help them any way I can.

When we started out, it looked like chaos. There were a lot of different things going on, a lot of different things happening. It was like chaos. But what has happened over the months is exactly what I knew was happening. They have a lot of individuals, but they do not have any group down there that really takes an interest in them. Now we are seeing that little over a year we have been down through there. The way that we got it was incredible. The guy who is part of the head of the program and into Steve's gun shop, and they are talking back and forth, and Steve tells him where we go to church and talked about this. He tells him what he does. The next thing I know, Steve and I take him out to dinner or out to lunch and meet with him, and there we are.

When you first went down there, the guys were kind of disorganized, and it is still somewhat disorganized. They do not have the structure that we have. But I will tell you how God has developed it. I knew it would happen. They have no teaching program. They have no format for these guys to give them anything. It is just like they are so bent running at both ends to try to get everything done. Now, basically, fundamentally, our guys that are sitting here or going down and teaching the mentoring program, they have given it pretty much to us that we go down there on a monthly basis. John spoke last time. I know Bob spoke. I have spoken. They are now asking us to go down and put a criteria together of successful living for these guys. God just keeps giving it to us. It is not because we deserve it. It is because you went down when nobody else would. You went down and did what nobody else wanted to do. You did not turn your nose up at it and say, "Well, that is chaotic. I cannot handle this." You realize that we live in a chaotic world, and you were willing to do it.

This is the incredible letter I got. He says something in here that we all ought to remember: "Dear friends, as we come to the Christmas season, our hearts are full of gratitude to all of you

who have given so much of your time and energy to our clients and your mentees this year. The encouragement and support you bring into mentoring relationship shows how much you care." Here comes the quote: "And of course, no one cares how much you know until they know how much you care." That is so true. That is what you have done. You went down there first, bought the field, showed them how much you care. Now God takes that. You made an investment, and then God gives you a return. It is just that simple.

I think about going back to Restart, the work crews that go down there. The work crews at Restart, you go down and you paint, and you scrape and you paint and you clean. The ladies that cook, you haul out the trash. You put your hands in stuff that you never dreamed you would want to put your hands in. Some of the most ungodly stuff. I walked in there the other day when you had a scrape. I forget who showed me. There was this big dark line all around this wall underneath this shelf. Somebody brought me in there and said, "Do you know what that is?" I said, "No." He said, "That is cockroach doo doo." It was so encrusted in there for all the years. People would do what you did. I did what you did. I said, "I do not think it is cockroach." "Yeah, it is. It is. Yep." And he is scraping it. Nobody ever complains. Nobody says, "I am not sticking my hand in cockroach doo doo." Nobody says, "I will not do that." You simply learn to do things. I cannot tell you how invaluable this is in doing for God. You simply learn to do things which nobody else wants to do. I cannot tell you how God will bless that. I cannot tell you what God will do with that.

## VII. The Law of Sowing and Reaping

"Withhold not good from people when it is your hand to give it." Nothing will make you Christ-like more than being like Christ in your service to others. In the ministry, you have the takers. I said it a couple of weeks ago. In the ministry, you are always going to have the people who take, but you are always going to have the people that give. You are always going to have people who take everything and give nothing back. And you are always going to have people who take nothing and give everything back. I guarantee you, I know how life looks at it. The takers in life may always eat better, but the givers in life will always sleep better because it is simply doing what God wants you to do. It is incredible.

Paul takes this very principle in Proverbs 3 and develops it into a New Testament principle for Christians found in Galatians 6:9-10.

*Galatians 6:9-10*

*And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*

*As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*

He says, "Let us not be weary in well doing." I am the first one to tell you, you can get weary in well doing. One of the great principles that I am going to put in my book of the things that I have learned in the last 63 years of my life is, "No good deed will go unpunished." You will do something good all your life and try to help people, and those people come back around and

clobber and bite you. You can get weary in well doing. But he says, "in due season, we reap if we faint not." We help saved people, our own. We help unsaved people. We reach out to them. The key word here is opportunity. The key word is opportunity, and they are all around us.

Along with this, here are two other great principles. Most of the time, we think of these principles in a bad context.

*Hosea 8:7*

*For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up.*

*Galatians 6:7*

*Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*

Hosea 8:7 and Galatians 6:7 give us two great principles. Galatians 6:7 says we are going to reap what we sow. Hosea 8:7 says we reap more than we sow. That is true in life. Not only do you reap what you sow, but you always reap more than you sow. We always use that in a bad connotation, and it is. But in the Bible, there are two kinds of sowing. These two verses we use them to show that you reap what you sow in a bad context and you reap more than you sow in a bad context. But I want you to know there is a good side to sowing if you sow the right things, and the right things are the Word of God. In that, you will always reap back in the Word of God with what you sow when you sow the good things, more than you sow. It works both ways. You do wrong in life, you sow the wind, you reap the whirlwind, you will get more back. But if you sow the Word of God, you will also get more back.

*Psalms 107:37*

*And sow the fields, and plant vineyards, which may yield fruits of increase.*

You see, there is a good return, "fruits of increase."

*Psalms 126:5-6*

*They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.*

*He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.*

## VIII. The Word of God Never Returns Void

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Isaiah 55:11. I have used it for years and years, and I never forget it. Sometimes when you get weary in well doing, sometimes when it looks like your good deeds are being punished, it will always hold the line and always keep you in perspective.

*Isaiah 55:11*

*So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*

That is the greatest principle I think that I try to keep in my mind because when you do not, situations can fool you. Circumstances can fool you. If you do not care for yourself, let those things get inside you, and it will mess you up. When I talk about letting biblical principles override things or situations in life, this is a great one. I realize no matter what happens in the immediate and what somebody's response is to it or what somebody likes or does not like, I know this: I know the bigger picture. The bigger picture is that when you and I put out the Word of God, it does not matter what the person thinks about it. It does not matter if the person gets mad. It does not matter if the person gets angry, even leaves the church. What only matters is if the Word of God went out, and He promised that that Word would never return void. It will always accomplish the purpose that God sent it to.

I take great peace in that. There have been times and situations when you have given somebody in a bad marriage situation, and you sit down and show them the truth, and they did not want to hear it, and they go out. Yet five years later, they will come back. Five years later, maybe divorced now, the husband will come back or the wife will come back and say, "You know what, you were right." It is a great principle that once you put the Word of God out, once you show it, it will always return, it will never return void. It will always accomplish the purpose, and it will always be a benefit. It is just that simple.

You take a kernel of corn, just one little kernel of corn, and you plant it in the ground. You have the right amount of rain, the right amount of sun, the right amount of air. A little stalk comes up. A little stalk of corn grows up, knee-high by the 4th of July, and then by August, it is up there. Now you have a stalk of corn that bears two ears of corn, with each one having 300 kernels. From the one little kernel you planted, you now have 600.

People are like trees in the Bible. You follow the path of Johnny Appleseed. There are places in Ohio and Illinois and down through there where he was in history where all you have are apple trees. He carried apple seeds in his pocket. He had a little bag of them, and one little apple seed planted in time brought up a tree, and for the next 40 or 50 years, it gave 200, 300,000 apples and had a potential of 4 million other trees, all because one little seed was planted.

When you realize what you have in your hand and you realize what you have the power in your hand to do, "withhold not good when it is in your hand to give it." When you do that with the Word of God, you always get back more than you sow, maybe not in this life, but in the one to come.

## IX. Edward Kimball and John Dillinger: Two Opportunities

There are two great examples in history on this one: one is good, one is bad. This is a test, a Christmas test. Does anybody know who Edward Kimball was? No, it was not the fugitive, that was Richard Kimball. Does anybody know who Edward Kimball was? You will know when I tell you. Does anybody know who D.L. Moody was? Okay. Edward Kimball, nobody knows who he is. But he was the man that won D.L. Moody to Christ.

D.L. Moody became one of the greatest preachers in the 19th and 20th century. He developed Moody Church and Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. He is probably responsible for millions of

people coming to Christ. When he was 17 years old and struggling with what he was going to do in life, he went to work in his uncle's shoe store. Edward Kimball was a Sunday school teacher. Edward Kimball saw in Moody the struggles that he had. One afternoon, in the back room of that shoe store, he opened up a Bible and won D.L. Moody to Christ.

He had it in his hand to do good. He saw in that young man what I see in so many of you. He saw in that young man what so many of you see in your mentees or the people down at Turnaround, or your neighbors or friends, and God put them in your life. Justin and Jeanette saw it in you guys, and that is why you are here today. It is the ongoing story in our church because that is what happens. Edward Kimball saw in D.L. Moody what nobody else saw, and he saw the opportunity and took the opportunity, and he won that man to Christ. With the one seed that he planted, what a return D.L. Moody brought! It is incredible.

Now I have another story. This one is not so good, but it is true. A little 12-year-old boy named John, born around 1910, had very poor parents. Both parents were drunks. He had nothing. His parents had nothing. They lived in a little tar shack. One day, he decided to go to church. He went to church; it was down the street from his house, a big old Southern Baptist church. When he went in there, they ushered him into a Sunday school class. All the other kids were dressed real nice. Little Johnny had nothing, basically rags, dirty, smelly. He sat in the Sunday school class and listened. After the Sunday school class, the Sunday school teacher, who was a deacon in that church, pulled Little Johnny aside and told him it would probably be better for Little Johnny not to come back to church until he got some decent clothes to wear.

Little Johnny was crushed. Little Johnny never went back to church. Little Johnny got so fed up because of what that man said, and so hurt and so broken over the thing, that later on in life, it forged a real disdain for anything that has to do with Christians. Little Johnny grew up to be the infamous John Dillinger.

Both men had it in their hand, did they not? Kimball had it in his hand when he saw the opportunity with D.L. Moody; he won him to Christ. This deacon, this Sunday school teacher, had it in his hand when he saw this little dirty Johnny to make a difference in his life. Instead of reaching out to him and making a difference, he sent him onto a life of crime and probably, obviously, into a life without Christ, an eternity without Christ. What an opportunity on both sides. One man saw it, took it, grabbed it; the other man missed it and set him on a life spree of crime.

## X. The Power of Kindness and Opportunity

"Withhold not good from people when it is in the power of your hand to do it." One little kindness at the right spot, showing one little kindness. I have come to the degree that I think the success, real success in people in ministry, is that legitimately people just want to feel special. They want to feel like they are needed. Most pastors are so busy doing whatever they do, they never have time to just stop and say some kind word to somebody and encourage them, or "You are glad to be here today," hug them, put your arm around them, and just love on them and let them know how important it is for them to be here. That is all people want. People are tired of

going to churches where you just become a number or a giving number or a giving record. They want something back. They want to know that they are important. If you can master that and you can come to the point where you spend your life just taking just one little act of kindness can change a life that in time can change the world. For the most part, people just want to feel special.

I realize there are people out there that want nothing to do with God, and you could be kind to them all day, and I have done it, you have done it, and we went up, put our arm around them and said, "We love them. We want you to this, to that." You might as well have been talking to a statue. I understand it. You are not going to get everybody. But my point is, do not miss the opportunities of the ones you can get. They are all around us. You are going to go through life as an Edward Kimball, you are going to go through life as this Southern Baptist Sunday school Deacon. There are opportunities all around us every day just like that.

I have said it many, many times, and I watch it. Some of you never miss an opportunity. I watch you. You never miss an opportunity. Yet some of you never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity because they are all around us. You never want to look at one of our kids in our elementary just as little kids. You never want to get in and follow that trap. Every one of them is important. The thing that I love that you parents are doing so well is a lot of your kids are bringing their little friends to church. Last month, I have heard stories where kids had choices to go do this or do this, and this father's choice would give them the ability to come to church on Thursday night or Sunday, and they will pick this because they want to come to church. Your kids are making a difference. Your kids are making a difference because you are making a difference in your kids. That is the key.

I brought you up to sing with me this morning, and I meant every word I said. You and I are going to tear the world up one of these days. You are my buddy. I would give you anything, do anything for you, help you anyway. Why? I have seen you. From the very day you came, I have seen in you what God wants, and I will tell you, you are a worthwhile investment. All of our kids are. I watch all of your kids. Your kids are crazy, running around the place. Your kid is going to be president someday, and he will be the right kind of president. They are boys. What do you expect? But at the end of the day, you have got to look beyond that. You have got to make it beyond the eye gouging and nose pulling and all that stuff. You see a little tenderness in their heart. That is where it is at. You never want to look at those kids when they are running around out there, or you get a chance to hug them, and they come up and put your arm around them. I want your kids, I do not want them to see me as some pastor over here that they do not know. I go to all their activities. I go to everything. I want them to know that they have a pastor who knows who they are, who loves them. I am paying my money down now that five, six, seven, eight years from now, when the devil comes knocking on their door and they have some problems, I will have already built my relationship with them. Of course, that will not be your problem. You will be going with me knocking on the door.

It is looking around you. It is not just having the tunnel vision of seeing where you are at in life. It is the ability to look beyond that. It is the ability to see the opportunities around you. It is the ability that Kimball had when he saw that 17-year-old. I guarantee you, when Moody was 17

years old, he was not the great Bible teacher and Bible preacher that he was later on in life. He was just like any other 16, 17-year-old kid you ever saw in life. He had issues. He had his problems. Old Kimball saw him because he had a burden, because he made a choice, because he had a desire and because he had a burden. He reached out to that kid and took the opportunity, planted one little seed that blossomed into tens of thousands, if not millions, of people coming to Christ. What a difference John Dillinger's life could have made if he would not have wound up dead in the streets of Chicago, shot down by the FBI, if that seed would have been planted, that that guy would have taken him in, changed his life, and set him on a course to do good to others.

You have the power in your hands. It is in your hands. That is why that verse is such a powerful verse. Do not miss the opportunities. When you have it in your hand to do good, the opportunities are around us all the time. Never look at one of our kids or their little friends that they bring or the visitors that come to this church. People come to this church, and I know some of them are passing through, and some of them are here on vacation or come to see their friends at holidays. But there are people that you bring from your work who are maybe struggling in their life, and they see something in your world that they do not have.

Most people are sick and tired, and that is why most people do not—I was driving down the street the other day. I have been at my house, and there is a billboard from one of the major Baptist churches in town here, and it gave you your Christmas checklist to do for the new year. The first one was "Get out of debt." The second one was "Get in shape." And the last one was "Come to church." That is where it is at today. I am not big on billboards, but if I—number one for me would be "Get back to church." But that is the way we approach the world today. Get out of debt so you can get into more debt. Get in shape so you can eat some more bad food and get out of shape again. Then your whole life will be out. There is only one thing that will solve all of those problems, and he put it third on the list. It is not just going to church, in a sense. It is getting into the Bible.

When you have good in your hand and God gave it to you, do good with it. That is a great Christmas message, is it not? But it is not. People like to make it, and this is why I said earlier on, I am going to work hard at not making it a Christmas message. Because it is not a Christmas message. It is a thing that we need to do every day of our life. It is a thing that we need to do all that we do. "Withhold not good when it is in the power of your hand to give it." Your hands, if you are saved, you have the power of God to do things, make things happen. You turn your pages. You point to verses. You work. You clean. You do all the stuff that you do. God will put opportunity in your life.

The greatest key word is opportunity. The greatest picture in the Bible, because the word opportunity is an open door in the Bible. It is an opportunity to do something. The greatest church in the Bible that had the most opportunity was the church of the open door. That is when William Booth was right in the middle of that. They saw the need of this world. They reached out to this world, and they planted the seeds. You will sow for the world, or you will sow for God. When you sow for the world, you will reap more than you sow. And when you sow for God, you will reap more than you sow. It is just that simple. But you, as God's people, have it in your hand. God right now, you may not see Him, you may not know it, but God right now has put people all

around your world that are opportunities for you. You just have to see what you have in your hand. It is just that simple.

So that is a Christmas message, not a Christmas message. But it shows you one of the greatest principles that you have ever learned. One of the things that really changed my whole concept of the ministry is simply looking at people as they are. I have told you before, there are only two things worth investing your life in in all the world because they are the only two things that are going to last for eternity. One of them is the Word of God, and one of them is the souls of men. But you have to see the opportunities. God will put the opportunities around you, but if you do not get into a book that reveals those opportunities, you will never see them. We will stop there today.