

INTRODUCTION

As we begin 2010 I'm talking about "iFocus Apps to Win in 2010." If you want to see some positive changes in your life in 2010, it's important to narrow your focus on a few very important issues. Last week I talked about the Faith App, and I challenged you to make Philippians 4:13 your verse for the year. Try downloading and applying these ten words to your life: "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength." Today I want you to download the Opportunities App, and next week I'll challenge you to download the Worship App. I'll conclude the series by talking about the giving App.

The word "app" is just an abbreviation for "application." Just last week Apple announced that downloads of iPhone apps had passed the 3 billion mark. But they also announced that the average life span of an app is 28 days; in other words, on average, when someone downloads an app to their iPhone, they delete it within a month. You also have to constantly upgrade iPhone apps.

When I use the word "app" I mean to apply the Word of God to your life. The good news is that you never have to update God's Word—and it lasts more than 28 days, in fact, it's eternal. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will NEVER pass away." (Matthew 24:35) That includes everything we can see and touch, including iPhones.

How is your focus today? A few years ago there was a funny movie called "The Runaway Bride." Julia Roberts played a reluctant bride who left four grooms standing at the altar. In the movie she's engaged to Bob, a football coach. Richard Gere plays Ike, a USA Today reporter, who's writing an article about her. There's a funny scene in the movie where Coach Bob tries to make sure Maggie follows through this time. He tells Ike, the reporter, how important it is for Maggie to focus. He says, "That's what we're working on: Focus. Right, Maggie? Focus on Maggie. Focus on Bob." Maggie says reluctantly, "Right." Bob continues, "I lead Maggie through a visualization exercise. All the sports shrinks use this head stuff. Visualize the end zone, if you catch my drift." He hands a notepad to Maggie and says, "Here's today's mantra: 'It's an open field to Big Bob.'" By this time Ike has reached his limit and he asks Maggie, "Tell me. When you get to the altar will you spike the bouquet?"

That's a funny scene, but focus really is important. Remember, if you chase two rabbits at the same time they will both escape. The term multi-tasking has taken on new meaning in the 21st century. Computers can multitask, but we can really only focus on one thing at a time. When you try to do several things simultaneously you become less effective. A study conducted by the British Institute for Psychiatry showed that checking your email while you try to perform another creative task lowers your IQ in that moment by over 10 points. A key element in being able to fully focus is that you only do one thing at a time.

Today I'm going to ask you to focus on Opportunities to reach out to people who need to have a personal relationship with Jesus. To do this I want us to focus on a personal encounter Jesus had in John 4.

Jesus was tired and hungry, and while the disciples went into town for takeout, Jesus rested at the

well outside the city. As He sat there, a woman approached the well. It was obvious that she was an outcast, because the women usually came to the well together in the early morning when it was cool, and it was their time to talk among themselves. But this woman came out in the heat of the day, all by herself. Jesus risked his reputation by even speaking to her. It was socially unacceptable for a man to speak to a woman unless she was a member of the family. In addition, Jesus was a Jew, and Samaritans were "half-breeds" hated by most Jews. She also had a checkered past. Jesus said, "Go call your husband." She said, "Sir, I don't have a husband." With a twinkle in His eye Jesus said, "You can say that again. You've already had five husbands, and you're with a man now who isn't your husband." You talk about somebody caught in a bad romance! You've heard of the story of the Good Samaritan, we could say this is the story of the bad Samaritan! Yet, knowing all of this, Jesus looked at her with compassion and offered her living water so she would never thirst again.

Usually when you hear a message from this passage, all the attention is giving to their conversation, but I want us to focus on what happened next.

John 4:27. "Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, 'What do you want?' or 'Why are you talking with her?' Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?' They came out of the town and made their way toward him. Meanwhile his disciples urged him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you know nothing about.' Then his disciples said to each other, 'Could someone have brought him food?' 'My food,' said Jesus, 'is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, 'four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying, 'One sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.' Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I ever did.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.'

The most amazing thing about this story is the outcast became an evangelist who brought other people into a relationship with Jesus. Her changed life started a chain reaction of salvation for hundreds of others! Will you focus on opportunities to do what this woman did? I want to share a five-part challenge with you about how God can use YOU the same way He used this woman from Samaria.

(1) THE OPPORTUNITY OF A LIFETIME IS COMING THIS JULY 4th WEEKEND!

I'm excited about occupying the Crosswalk Conference Center in June. But rather than having a ribbon cutting or dedication, we're going to do something entirely different. We're going to use

this facility for the largest evangelistic effort we've ever launched. We're calling it Freedom Celebration and it will happen over the weekend of July 2-5. You may usually have plans to go to the lake on the 4th or to go over to Uncle Fred's for his barbecued ribs, but for this one year I'm asking you to devote your 4th of July weekend to God. I'm asking you to be here to help us by being a part of Freedom Celebration. And we need *everyone*.

Let me introduce the weekend to you. On Friday night, we're going to have the largest banquet for women and girls in the history of East Texas. 1,500 women and girls will gather in the Crosswalk Conference Center to enjoy a delightful meal and hear an inspiring speaker. But the point of this banquet *isn't* for Christian fellowship. It's for evangelism. It's going to be a ticketed event, but ladies; you can't buy just one ticket. You have to buy at least two. And you can't give your other ticket to your BSF sister who goes to Marvin Methodist. You have to bring that gal who works at the beauty salon or department store who you suspect doesn't have a relationship with Jesus.

On Saturday our Children's Ministry and Recreation Ministry is going to offer a Family Fair in the parking lot between the Worship Center and the Student Center. There will be games and special activities for children of all ages, and there will be a car and boat show. Then on Saturday night we're going to have the largest Men's Sports Banquet in East Texas history. We're having a nationally known pro athlete speak as well as a few surprises. Again, guys, no single tickets will be sold. You'll have to get at least two tickets—and your other tickets go to men or boys who need Jesus.

On Sunday evening our Single's Ministry will host a huge gathering in the Crosswalk Conference Center. The largest segment of unchurched people in East Texas are singles, and we're here to convince them that the best place to find meaning in life is NOT in the singles bars, but in a relationship with Jesus.

Our anchor event for Freedom Celebration is I Love America on Sunday morning and Monday evening. Former Vietnam Green Beret veteran Bobby Welch will be sharing his amazing testimony and our Celebration Choir and Orchestra will be celebrating our nation's spiritual heritage through music.

It's going to be an amazing time, and I'm expecting God to save hundreds of people. The main thing you can do now is to begin to pray for Freedom Celebration. That's why we have this Prayer Guide available today. It will guide you over the next 40 days to know how to pray. These prayer guides are free and can be found at the welcome center and in the foyers of the other buildings. Please take one and start praying tomorrow.

Here's the next challenge:

(2) THE NEWS ABOUT JESUS IS TOO GOOD TO KEEP TO YOURSELF

In our story, the woman left her water pot at the well and immediately went back into her city and started telling people about Jesus. She said, "Come see a man who told me everything I ever did." That was her message. "Come, see Jesus." If Jesus has changed your life, you should

demonstrate the same kind of excitement.

People aren't going to come to Freedom Celebration or Green Acres through television advertising or direct mail pieces. They are bombarded constantly with ads and commercials. But what will get their attention is when you tell them what a difference Jesus has made in your life. You can say, "Come, see the One who changed my life."

Word of mouth is the very best advertising. Guys, if you discovered a fuel additive that added 50 horsepower to your truck and gave you better gas mileage, you'd tell your buddies about it. Ladies if you discovered a store where expensive clothes and shoes were on sale for a fraction of the cost, you're going to tell your friends. Kids, if you discovered a website where you could legally download all the latest songs for a quarter you're going to tell your friends.

God is going to give you some opportunities over the next few months to make a difference in someone's eternity. All you have to say is, "Come, see what a difference Jesus has made in my life." Are you looking for those opportunities? One of my favorite quotes about opportunity comes from Thomas Edison. Edison said, "Most people don't recognize opportunity because it comes dressed in overalls and looks like work."

The sad thing is many church members are content just to sit around and let someone else do all the work. It reminds me a funny poem I once heard. It goes this way, "Sam wasn't much for stirring about / It wasn't his desire. / While others worked to build the church / Old Sam was sittin' by the fire. / Same old story, day by day / He never seemed to tire. / While others brought people to Christ / Old Sam was sittin' by the fire. / One day Sam died as all must do / Some say he went up higher / But if he's doing what he always did / Sam's STILL sittin' by the fire!" That's cute. But the truth is if you're a follower of Jesus, you won't go to hell if you don't share your faith, but someone you know and love may go to hell instead.

(3) MAKE THE MOST OF THE RELATIONSHIPS YOU ALREADY HAVE

This woman already had relationships with people back in her city. In fact, she probably had too many relationships! But when Jesus changed her life, those are the people she went to and said, "Come see the man who changed me."

As you think about bringing people to Jesus start by looking at the opportunities God has already given you through your current relationships. Use your FRAN-ships. Do you know what Fran stands for? F stands for Friendships. Mentally inventory your friends. Do you have a friend who, if they died today, you aren't certain they would go to heaven? Friends don't let friends drive drunk. But real friends don't let friends go to hell.

R stands for Relatives. Do you have anyone in your extended family who needs Jesus? Are there siblings, aunts, uncles, or cousins who need the good news? A stands for Associates. These are people who work with you or students who attend class with you. You may not be as close to them as friends and relatives, but you already know them. The N stands for Neighbors. Are there people in the shadow of your house or apartment who need the Lord? You may only speak to them in passing, but God has given you a relationship bridge to them. Will you walk over that

bridge and invite them to come see the man who changed your life?

(4) CULTIVATE NEW RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE WHO NEED JESUS

Jesus told his disciples to lift up their eyes and look at the harvest. When they looked up what did they see? They saw this woman leading a group of people toward the well to meet Jesus. Will you lift up your eyes to East Texas and look at the harvest? Don't look at fields or trees—look at people.

Jesus used a farming metaphor, and those of you who know something about planting flowers or vegetables know what it means to cultivate the soil. You prepare the soil to be more productive by breaking up the lumps of dirt and removing the weeds. Jesus said, "Don't say four months and THEN the harvest comes." He said look NOW. That's what I'm asking you to do. Don't wait five months until Freedom Celebration is here; start looking NOW for people who need Jesus.

The truth is that some of you have been Christians so long that you don't even have any friends who aren't Christians. So let me ask you to lift up your eyes and start looking around. Answer this question: Who is someone you can befriend for Jesus' sake?

Jesus hung out with sinners so He could share the good news with them. Would you be willing to intentionally befriend someone who isn't exactly like you for the sole purpose of introducing them to Jesus?

It would be easy to sit there right now and say, "That sounds nice. I hope they succeed in Freedom Celebration." What is this "they" stuff? It's not THEY, it's US. In order for God to save as many people as possible, it's going to take everyone working together as a team. Jesus spoke about one person sowing, and another person reaping, but at the harvest they both rejoice. Some are good at sowing the gospel, planting good seeds by kindness and compassion. Others are better at reaping the harvest. Freedom Celebration is going to be a team effort.

I grew up watching Professional Wrestling on TV in South Alabama. "Professional Wrestling," talk about an oxymoron! Of course, we pronounced it RASSLIN'. Some times there would be tag-team matches. Of course, there were the good guys and the bad guys. The good guy could be down on the mat getting the stuffing kicked out of him, but if he could reach up and tag his partner in the corner; his partner could jump into the ring and take over for him. Listen, if you will cultivate friendships, and sow some seeds, then bring these people to hear the gospel presented during Freedom Celebration, you can partner with some professional reapers who are coming in that weekend. You bring them, and then you can slap your partner and you've done your part!

(5) ONE CHANGED LIFE CAN TRANSFORM AN ENTIRE COMMUNITY!

The woman from Samaria brought her friends and family to Jesus and our text says that many believed because of her testimony. Then Jesus stayed for a couple of days and it says that many more became believers. She started a chain reaction that touched her entire city! Can you think

of a less likely candidate?

I might not be surprised if Peter or John had preached in the town and hundreds were saved, but she was the catalyst for change. Can you think of a less likely candidate for God to use? But God delights in using those we think are least likely. That way He alone gets the glory.

Let me ask you a question: What do you think the chances are that God can use you to start a chain reaction of salvation in East Texas? You may answer that by saying, "There are only two chances—slim and none—and slim just left town." Well, if you think you are the least qualified, then congratulations, that means that you're a perfect candidate.

It may be a sixth grade kid who starts telling her friends about Jesus. It might be a high school student who becomes so burdened that he can't stand thought of any of his classmates spending eternity in hell. It may be a college student, or a single adult who gets turned on to bringing people to Jesus. It could be a man or a woman who has never taught a Bible Study lesson, or a senior adult who decides they're going to spend however much time God gives them to introducing people to Jesus.

How many of you have ever heard of Edward Kimball? You probably haven't, because he was just an obscure Christian businessman who lived in Boston over 150 years ago. But in 1856 Edward Kimball walked into a shoe store and spoke to a salesman about Jesus. That shoe salesman was Dwight Moody who accepted Christ that day. Although Moody was never ordained, he became an evangelist and led thousands to Christ. Today there is Moody Bible College and Moody Press, but that's not the end of the story.

In 1879 Moody was preaching in London and a cold-hearted Presbyterian pastor named F.B. Meyer was jolted out of his slumber and he became an evangelist. In 1893 F.B. Meyer preached in America and influenced Wilbur Chapman to become an evangelist and tens of thousand were saved under his ministry. One of those was a colorful professional baseball player named Billy Sunday who was saved in 1904. Billy Sunday left baseball and became a national evangelist and many thousands were saved. In 1924 Billy Sunday held a Crusade in Charlotte, N.C. As a result of that meeting a group of businessmen began to pray and share their faith. They had a burden for Charlotte, so in 1934, they invited a preacher by the name of Mordecai Ham to preach. During that meeting a tall, lanky teenager, the son of a dairy farmer was saved. That boy's name? Billy Graham. Maybe you've never heard of Edward Kimball, but have you heard of Billy Graham? God has used him and millions have been saved. Maybe you're the next Billy Graham, or maybe you're the next Edward Kimball.

CONCLUSION

Today I'm asking you to use this Prayer Guide for the next 40 days. Pray for lost people. Pray that God will remove the barrier that stands between them and Jesus. Pray for God to send our more laborers into the harvest, and as you pray for that say, "Here am I, Lord, send me." But the main thing I'm asking you to pray for is that God will burden your heart for people who are far from God. Ask God to make you sensitive to the opportunities He is giving you to reach out to people who need the Living Water you have found.

Junior Hill is a long-time evangelist from Alabama. He's been my friend for years and even preached here at Green Acres in the 1990s. He tells the story about preaching in a church in Knoxville, Tennessee years ago. It was a Sunday morning and the church was packed with people, many of them needed Jesus. Junior said he preached his heart out and begged people to come to Christ, but when the invitation was given not a single person indicated their desire to accept Jesus. He was devastated. He felt like such a failure. He felt as if the devil had won in his battle to keep people from being saved. A man came up to him and said, "Preacher, we lost." Junior said, "I thought, 'At least there's another person who shares my sorrow. Here's a man who shares my pain that that nobody was saved.'" But before he could say anything, the man continued, "That's right preacher, Tennessee lost the football game yesterday. I think we need a new coach." Junior said it took a lot of the grace of God to keep him from punching that guy.

Can you relate to that? I know some people who are probably more upset that Texas lost the big game last Thursday than they are that they have neighbors and friends who are on the way to hell.

God is in the business of bringing men and women and boys and girls to faith in Jesus. He is giving us the opportunity to join Him in His plan. Start praying. Start looking. We're surrounded by people who need Jesus. Will you be the one to take advantage of these amazing opportunities?

OUTLINE

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* Freedom Celebration *

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Your FRAN-ships:

Friends

Relatives

Associates

Neighbors

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(5) ONE CHANGED LIFE CAN TRANSFORM AN ENTIRE COMMUNITY!

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes