

**Sermon Study Guide Based on
Guest Pastor Keith Jenkin's Message of September 20, 2009
"The Opportunity of a Lifetime"**

[Today's message encourages all of us that now is the time to help others in their area of need so that we will be able to minister to their ultimate need.]

[Topics: Relational Opportunities; Spiritual Gifts; Harvest Time]

Excerpt: [Guest Pastor Keith Jenkins is the Missional Coordinator, Greater Los Angeles District of the Foursquare Church.]

Let's talk about an opportunity of a lifetime we have set before us. Now if you don't recognize opportunities, they can pass you by. You can have opportunities for business, you can have opportunities for investment, and you can have relational opportunities.

Now if you are raising your teenagers, how many of you know that the window for them listening to you is closing rapidly. And so you have some opportunities that are called "teachable moments." The moon lined up with Venus just right and they want to hear what you have to say. If you're not careful, you can miss that opportunity.

So in this hour, in case you haven't noticed, it's harvest time. This is the opportunity of a lifetime. You're all thinking, "Sure this is harvest time. We're in a recession. We're in a near economic collapse. And the governor of California is selling state assets at auctions because we're in debt as a state.

But that's our opportunity. That's the church's opportunity. Our world and our community's needs are our opportunities. In fact everyone sitting in here is an answer to someone's problems outside these doors.

How many of you know the Lord as your personal Savior? Lift your hand right now. So now there are three things that are going to happen in the next couple of minutes. Some of you are going to be very inspired by the end of the sermon. Some of you will find that the Lord is going to stir you a little bit more than you already are. And then there's another group of you who are going to be disturbed.

Now if pastors and preachers are doing their job right, there should be some days when you come to church, you become inspired and you leave here thinking you can fly. Then there are other days when you come in here with a little complacency and indifference, there's a little stirring that needs to be done. Timothy was told by Paul to stir up the gift within him.

Then there are other days when we as a church have fallen away from things God would have us do and so we absolutely need to be disturbed about them.

Let's open our Bibles to **1 Peter 4:7-11**. Let's also think about all the things that surround us in our culture that cause uncertainty and anxiety. It was disturbing when the economy shifted, companies closed down or scaled back and many workers lost their jobs. They had

uncertainties what was going to happen to them and their families. And what's impacting the world is also impacting the church. So, if we're not careful, we'll start picking up the language of the culture and we'll start picking up the fear from watching the news.

And instead of giving words of faith and encouraging one another, we'll start repeating and parroting what the news media is telling us and not what the Lord says for the hour. Don't you know that when it's the darkest, that's when the church has its finest hour? This is our moment. This is the opportunity of a lifetime.

1 Peter 4:7-11, "The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. 8) Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 9) Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10) Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

11) If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen."

Verse 10 talks about the various forms and various expressions of God's grace. Everyone is gifted differently. Only about 3 to 4% of the church will ever get to speak publicly. And some of you are saying, "Praise God" because you don't want to get up and speak in front of anybody.

There are some people good technologically. They love to be on a computer. If you put them in a room where all they have to do is data entry, they're in heaven. If you put them in room crowded with people, they feel anxiety ridden.

Now God has gifted all of us to serve in some capacity. One of the things the Devil does is to causes us to be buried in issues and all kinds of problems and wounds so that we never fully recognize what God has deposited within us.

Let's ask a series of questions. The first question is: What's in your house? Not your physical house – your spiritual house. What has God placed within you? There was a notable miracle in the Old Testament that Elisha performed. There was a widow, who was caught in a famine who had lost everything and was about to lose her children. She also had lost hope and was ready to die.

But then Elisha came along and asked her some questions. **"Elisha replied to her, 'How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?' 'Your servant has nothing there at all,' she said, 'except a little oil'" (2 Kings 4:2).**

It's amazing how we miss what we have. There maybe something around your house or around your life right now that would be an answer, an absolute miracle for someone else. We always seem to go to the Lord and tell him what we don't have. But what is it you DO have that God has placed within your life? Now it may seem small or insignificant. But placed in the Lord's hands, it has wonder working power.

God has the ability to multiply what you have. But you know what, sometimes we tell God that we don't have anything, that we don't have any gifts. We tell God that we're getting older now. We tell him that our knees hurt, or our back hurts. Now on the days that nothing hurts, what can God do through you? There's another group that feel they can't do anything right and they're just happy to be here. They don't think God can use them.

Now there's a group of people in our culture who have failed miserably. They have committed adultery, they stolen things, they've had abortions. In other words they think they've done things that God can't forgive them. And you know he can, because he's forgiven you.

There's always a tension of those sitting inside the church and those sitting outside the church. We need to have our eye on the harvest. Your church could grow in numbers if you used the talents that God has given you. Ask your neighbor sitting next to you and ask, "What's in your house?"

Now here's the second question: Why not you? And if not you, then who? And if not now, when? Who is better than you to reach your neighbors? Who better than you to tell your coworkers about something that's going on. Listen, we're not talking about church programs.

Church programs don't work. They only work for Christians. That's why we have them. They keep Christians entertained and happy about church. Here's what statistics and studies bear out. Programs don't work but life styles do.

Do you know where you might find your most effective ministry – at Starbucks. Do you know why? Because people are looking for a place to connect. Outside of the home and outside of work, they call it "the third place." It's the place of meeting; it's the place of gathering.

How many of you have been saved for over five years? For over 10 years? Studies show that 5 years after your conversion, your connection with the unsaved, unchurched world diminishes to almost zero.

Do you know why? That's because you are so busy doing church and being in church that you don't have any time to build a relationship with anybody unsaved. We are so busy with church and "serving the Lord" that we don't have any time for those who don't know Jesus Christ.

We need to reach out to our communities. We thought if we just built bigger buildings and had better programs that the unchurched would come. And they don't. The church building is just a tool.

So what would you have to do (not the pastor) to reach out to others? How many remember the story of Esther and how she gains such incredible favor? She seems to be a quintessential princess concerning the things of God. In the story, Haman has a plan to annihilate the Jews. Mordecai, her uncle, wants Esther to go before the King and plead for the case of the Jews. But she refused because of what happened to the Queen before her. Mordecai then says to her:

"For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:24)

Today, when things look the darkest, is the time we've been called to live in. This is it. This is our moment. What if you were saved so that through your life, God could reach someone else? Instead of concentrating on church members, we need to reach out to friends, co-workers, and family members to capture the harvest.

Now resourceful people are those who not only get things done but they also know what's going on. We need to get those people out of the church and into the community, because they can't hear the stuff they need to hear in the church. They'll hear stuff like – there's a feeding program down town that's about to shut down and we need to do something about it.

And if we're not careful, we will say, "Not me." But the answer is, "Yes, you. And if not you, then who? And if not now, then when?" How many of you have looked at your community and felt a burden for it? You knew there was something that need to be done, but you didn't know what to do.

This is an inspirational example to pastor Keith. He has a friend that pastors a church of 250 members in Kansas City called the River Church. The pastor was told by God that when he or his members see a need in their city and they don't speak to God about it, they are accountable to Him for it. This changed the pastor's whole paradigm, because it wasn't "those people" out there anymore. Those are family members.

How dare us sitting here in the safety of the revelation knowledge of God and in the safety of his salvation ever say "those people." "Those people" are God's children, too. Those are our brothers and sisters. We need to talk with the teens in our neighborhood and gently tell them when they are doing things not right. We need to love them like Christ would love them. If not me, then who? If not now, then when?

We can't defer our responsibility for this generation to someone else. We also can't defer our opportunity we've been given either. What are we going to talk about for all eternity? What will be said of our generation? "We suffered through a great recession, so we couldn't really accomplish anything."

What are we going to say sitting around the river of life with the apostle Paul, who starts talking about the times he was stoned and Stephen talks about his being martyred for the faith and Peter talks about all the suffering he went through? What are we going to say – "We went through a recession, and it was really tough"? What will be our story?

It's time for us to use this moment as our opportunity of a lifetime. They're hurting, they're broken and they don't have answers. And when they say, "How come God has let this happen" you don't have to explain things for God. You can simply say, "I don't know. I wish I knew too. It does seem strange. But I know he loves us, because he gave his life for us. We don't have to question his love. He proved that once and for all."

Now how he moves and how he operates, we don't know. As pastor Keith's grandmother used to say, "God moves in mysterious ways."

Now the last point, which isn't a question like the other two points, is this: The Word must become flesh to our generation. We read in **John 1:14**, "**The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.**"

What is written must be demonstrated. Pastor Keith told the members of his church in Oregon not to do outreach with their Bibles, but rather demonstrate Christ. Our generation is sick of hearing preachers. And they're sick of seeing Christians punch in at 8 AM and don't start working until 8:30 and then tell them how to live. They watch us act just like they do—getting divorced, cheating on our spouses, see our kids wind up on drugs or our daughters wind up getting pregnant without spouses.

We don't seem to have much credibility anymore. Instead of telling them anything, we ought to serve among them and be like Christ to them as best we can. Inevitably we will fall short. And when we do, we should simply say, "I'm sorry. That wasn't a good representation of Christ right there. I'm sorry I lost my temper with you. Please forgive me. I'm going to be a better representation of Christ next time."

Don't say the church ought to feed the homeless. If you check it out, we, the members, are the church. Don't always expect the church to come up with the next good idea. Not only do we need to come up with ideas, but we also need to be willing to lead them and devote our time and money to them.

We need to do more than just talk about Christ; we need to demonstrate him in our actions. Jesus said, "**When you've seen me, you've seen the Father.**" Wouldn't it be great that as the members spill out of this church, you are like God's lighthouse in the community? And people would say of you that when they've seen you, they've seen the Father because of your kindness, your love, your service?

Pastor Keith talked about one of his neighbors who is hard to get to know, but he is slowly coming around. Pastor Keith isn't about to tell him that he's a pastor or that he needs Jesus! We need to reach people in their language, and not use Christianese type language.

We need to be fishers of men. When we become a Christian we quit relating to others. We tried to forget where we've come from. But, we're all fighting with our nature. So, we need to stop pretending when we get out among the unchurched, that we're not like them.

We've just been saved, that's all. We have been forgiven. They just haven't received the news yet. They need you to be a carrier of it. We need to build relationships. We need to bring people first to our homes, not necessarily the church. But we need to be discerning as to who we invite into our homes.

Do you older ladies realize that many of the younger generation of ladies don't know even how to cook? You could have a ministry of cooking and bless some young families. While you are in the kitchen, how much could you teach that young lady about virtue? Or how to treat her husband or how to manage the kids? You are involved in ministry and you never had to leave your house. Touching your neighbor this way is the opportunity of a lifetime.

Now many of you will ask, "Where do I start?" How many of you have a garage so cluttered you don't where to start? It's like wanting to clean out the garage but after opening the door,

you said, "Bless the Lord" and quickly closed it. It's just too daunting. We've made it so huge. So you feel that if you are ever going to reach your community, you think you need 6-8 weeks of "Soul-Winning" training, before you do anything.

You think that the church needs to give you a certificate that says you are, "Soul-Winning" qualified. Please try to find that certificate in the Bible. What's so amazing is that your neighbor may already know that you are a Christian and wonders how come you never speak to him. Or he wonders why when he was digging that hole for landscaping the other weekend, you never brought your shovel out to help or you never brought him any lemonade.

What act of kindness, what expression of love have you shown to others? We need to be adaptive and appeal to all kinds of people – sportsmen, business people. We need to be able to walk with all men. Didn't Paul say that he **"became all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some"**?

How many are you winning over to Christ? How many people have you brought to Christ because of your relationships? Most of us initially would say that we are too scared to do this. How many of you are too scared? Raise your hand. Some of you are too scared to even raise your hand to acknowledge your feelings. Keep your hands up and look around and see how many raised their hands. And you thought you were the only ones.

How many of you been somewhere and felt the Lord stirring you? You saw a gal at a bus stop or a guy at his desk and you felt that stirring. And you did exactly what every good Christian does – you ignored it and walked away.

What if the next time you got that stirring and you think to yourself, "I don't even know what to say God; I will probably screw it up", please realize that God is not counting on us to get it right. But he is trusting us to be available and to reach out to others and establish relationships.

Or what if you see a lady struggling with a lot of grocery bags and you went and grabbed one of those bags and took it to her car? She may ask you, "Why did you do that?" You've just been given an opportunity.

Or what if you saw someone distraught and down on their luck and you thought that's not my place to do something. Then whose place is it? That was your opportunity. You don't know what kind of dialogue would have opened up or where the conversation would have gone.

How many people, who were on the verge of committing suicide, have been encouraged by someone? It was one phone call; it was one person acknowledging them. It was one act of kindness, one seemingly insignificant act of another person that saved their life.

So here's where you start. You start at their perceived area of needs and then move to their ultimate needs. Start in the area where they acknowledge they have a need. Start there and be the answer. You be the answer. You and two of your friends be the answer. You and three of your co-workers be the answer to that problem for that person.

And then that will give you permission to move to their ultimate needs. We always want to start with "You need Christ." Do you realize that there are two things that have caused more wars than anything else in history – politics and religion? How can you talk to someone

about religion and you don't even know that person's name? It's probably not a good strategy for evangelism.

This church has an opportunity of a lifetime. Pastor Keith asked everyone who said that they were reluctant to reach out to others because they were afraid, stand on their feet. He asked – of those of you who are standing, how many of you had ideas on how to meet people's needs and you felt the enemy say to you it won't work? He commented, "That's all of you."

So here's what you ought to see when you look around the room. There are multitudes of people that are yet to be reached that could be reached through each and every one of you and the enemy knows it. He wants to keep you paralyzed to your potential.

Then Pastor Keith asked those who were standing to come up to the front so that he could pray over them so they could take advantage of this opportunity of a lifetime.

Key Scripture: 1 Peter 4:7-11, "The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. 8) Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 9) Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10) Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

11) If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen."

General Group Question: What specific opportunity has come your way that you a) responded to or b) missed? Briefly explain the circumstances.

Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other's needs afterwards.

1. What is the most outstanding spiritual gift has God given you? How are you using it to benefit others?
2. How many unchurched friends do you have? What can you do to have more?
3. What opportunities has God given you to befriend someone in your neighborhood or workplace? How have you responded?
4. How should we view and treat others who don't yet know Jesus Christ? Why?
5. Has God ever stirred you to reach out and help someone? How did you respond?
6. What holds you back from reaching out to others and exemplify Jesus Christ to them? What can you do to overcome your doubts and fears?
7. How will you respond to the opportunity of a lifetime you've been given?