

WHEN OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

TOOLBOX

- THINK
- OBSERVE
- CLOSE-UP
- WRITE
- DISCUSS
- FEELINGS
- BRAINSTORM
- REFERENCE
- PASSAGE
- ARTICLE
- BIG IDEA
- CROSSROAD

A REAL LIFE DRAMA

Scene 1
 The DC-10 was almost empty as I boarded the flight bound for Chicago from Newark International Airport. Surveying the plane as we awaited departure, I had quickly spotted the row of five empty seats I intended to stretch out on after take-off. Until then, I decided to be a bit sociable, and began a conversation with the man sitting next to me.

His name was Richard. Although we had a few things in common, his trip to New York City was vastly different in purpose than mine. His visit to a cancer research institute ended in an agreement with his doctors that there would be no more chemotherapy, no more radiation treatment. He simply wanted to return to his home and three children in Nebraska, and make the most of the time he had left to live.

As we conversed, Richard turned toward me. Until that point, I had only seen the right side of his face. As he turned, the left side of his face revealed the devastation of his skin cancer. It looked like one raw, open wound. Although he faced certain death, his concern was for his children. Adding to his concern was the fact that his wife had died a few months earlier as a result of a fall down a staircase at home. Since neither he nor his wife had any siblings, Richard's aged parents were the only relatives left to care for his children.

Nebraska had been the only home for his children. His parents knew little of life outside their home in New Jersey. Death was so sure; the thought of leaving his children so somber. At that point in our conversation I asked if I could tell him about something that changed my life. As he nodded, I took a napkin left over from breakfast and sketched out the *Four Spiritual Laws*. As I came to the end of that brief presentation of the gospel, I asked him, "Richard, will you trust Jesus Christ for your future—for what lies beyond the grave for you? Will you look to this One who left his own grave behind and believe that he holds hope for you and for the care of your children?"

Richard clutched my hand and said, "Pray with me." Right then, about 10,000 feet over the city of Chicago, Illinois, he gave his heart to Jesus Christ.

Adapted from a story written by Dr. John Aker, pastor-teacher of Christ Community Church in Tucson, Arizona.

"Small opportunities are often the beginning of great enterprises."
 —Demosthenes, Greek orator

"We are continually faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as insolvable problems." —John Gardner

"Some people expect the door of opportunity to be opened with an electric eye."
 —Howard Hendricks

DISCUSS

1. What circumstances did God orchestrate in this story?
2. What did John do to seize the opportunity that God provided?



CONSIDER

Have you ever experienced a "divine opportunity?"
 What happened?

YOUR LIFE DRAMA

What is unique about being a student?

What kinds of opportunities exist now for God to influence others through you now that won't exist later?

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Esther, a Jewish girl, orphaned at an early age, the heroine of the story
Mordecai, Esther's cousin, who adopted her and raised her
Hathach, one of Esther's attendants
Haman, son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews
King Xerxes, king of Persia who reigned over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush
Queen Vashti, King Xerxes' wife, whom he deposed

Scene

Susa, the royal winter residence and capital of ancient Elam, 479-478 B.C.

The Plot

In the third year of King Xerxes' reign, he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. During the celebration King Xerxes and his wife, Queen Vashti, had a falling out which resulted in her deposal. Eventually, his thoughts turned to remarriage. Upon the recommendation of his personal attendants, Xerxes required officials in each province to present young women to him so he could select a new queen.

Esther was one of those young women. After the death of her parents, Esther had been adopted and raised by her cousin, Mordecai. She was beautiful, and her modesty and humility impressed everyone who met her. King Xerxes was immediately attracted to Esther, and placed the royal crown on her head, making her queen.

Meanwhile, Mordecai conducted business in the market and maintained communication with Esther, but encountered conflict with Haman, one of the king's nobles. In retaliation, perhaps reflecting the long-standing enmity between Haman's people and the Jews, Haman persuaded the king to have all the Jews killed. The slaughter was planned to occur on one day, which was determined by casting the lot, or pur. When the news reached the people, there was great mourning among the Jews.

The only hope for the Jews was for the king to put an end to Haman's decree.



INSIGHT

What characterized the relationship between Esther and Mordecai?

- 2:7
- 2:11
- 2:20

Act 3, scene 4.
City square.

Esther, not knowing about Haman's edict, heard that Mordecai was mourning and sends Hathach to find out what is troubling him.

Read Esther 4:6-8



DISCUSS

If you were Esther hearing this news for the first time, what would you be thinking and feeling?

What would you think of Mordecai's suggestion?

Act 3, scene 5.

Queen's quarters.
Esther prepares a message for Hathach to take to Mordecai.

Esther 4:9-11

*Dear Mordecai,
 All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned will be put to death. The king can spare their life if he extends the gold scepter to him. But the king hasn't summoned me in over thirty days.*

*Love,
 Esther*



OBSERVE

What was Esther's initial response? Why do you think she responded that way?



DISCUSS

From a human perspective, was her response legitimate? Why or why not?



INSIGHT

No one could approach the king in the inner court without being summoned by him. "The penalty for such a transgression was death. On occasion the king had been known to extend his golden scepter to an uninvited person as a gesture of mercy."

-The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol.4, page 817

What is at stake if she answers . . .

NO?

YES?

Act 3, scene 6.
Later, in the Queen's quarters.
Enter Hathach.
Esther receives another
message from Mordecai.

Esther 4:13,14

Dear Esther,
Do not think that because you are in the
king's house you alone of all the Jews will
escape. 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?
Love,
Mordecai



OBSERVE

What is Mordecai's argument?

If she remains silent?
If she speaks?



DISCUSS

Why was Mordecai convinced
deliverance would occur?



INSIGHT

Although it is not directly stated, the implication is that God will accomplish His objective by another means. "The statement 'relief and deliverance . . . will arise from another place' (4:14) comes very close to being an acknowledgement of God and probably should be understood that way."

*The Expositor's Bible
Commentary*, gen. ed.
Frank E. Gaebelin,
vol. 4, p. 785 .

Esther sends a final message to Mordecai

Esther 4:15,16

*Dear Mordecai,
Go, gather together all the Jews who are
in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or
drink for three days, night or day. I and
my maids will fast as you do. When this is
done, I will go to the king, even though it is
against the law. And if I perish, I perish.
Love,
Esther*



DISCUSS

How would you describe
Esther's response?



CONSIDER

Why is she now willing to put
her life on the line?



INSIGHT

"Prayer and fasting before God were customary concurrent practices in times of sorrow, anxiety, or penitence." *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 4, page 817."

"Prayer, which usually accompanied such fasting, was presumably a part of this fast as well . . . The omission of any reference to prayer or to God is consistent with the author's intention; absence of any distinctively religious concepts or vocabulary is a rhetorical device used to heighten the fact that it is indeed God who has been active in the whole narrative . . ." *The NIV Study Bible*, gen. ed. Kenneth Barker, page 725.

Esther appears before the king, and he extends the gold scepter to her. When he asks what she wants, she invites the king to a banquet that day, and asks him to bring Haman. At the banquet, she invites them both to another banquet the next day, and says she would make her request at that time.

After the first banquet, Haman sees Mordecai at the king's gate, and is distressed. He decides to build a gallows that night to hang Mordecai on the next day before the second banquet. Meanwhile, the king is unable to sleep, and has the record of his reign read to him. The accounts record that Mordecai had exposed an assassination plot against the king. The next day Mordecai escapes

execution because the king chose to honor him for saving his life before Haman had a chance to hang him.

At the second banquet, Esther pleads for her people to be spared. The king is upset, and asked who was responsible for plotting their annihilation, apparently not realizing this was Haman's intention when he approached the king initially. Esther reveals Haman as the one responsible, and he is hanged on the gallows he had had built for Mordecai. The king then gives Mordecai and Esther the authority to write another decree in behalf of the Jews. According to the new decree, on the day that the Jews were to be killed, their enemies instead were killed. This victory is celebrated every year with the feast called Purim.

A REAL LIFE DRAMA

JOHN'S STORY, CONTINUED

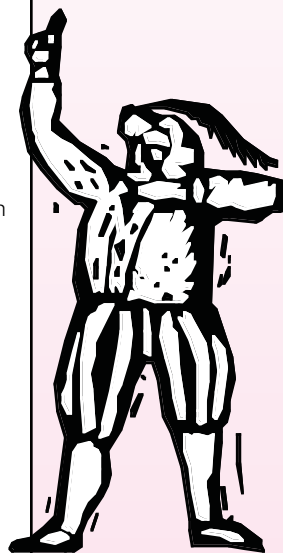
Scene 2

Several months later I had been back on the East Coast for a ministry opportunity in the New York area. As I boarded the plane at Newark, I was tired, but I was going home. I sat next to an older woman, buckled up, and went to sleep. Shortly after breakfast had been served, I woke up and realized that I hadn't taken time to invest in the life of the woman next to me, nor had I allowed her to share any of her life with me.

As we began to talk, I discovered that she was on her way to a small town in Nebraska. When I asked the name of the town, she was amazed that I had heard of it. I said, "Yes, I sat with a man on this plane last November, this same flight." Then I told her his name.

She looked at me and said, "You must be John. I'm Richard's mother." She went on to tell me how Richard was walking in that decision he made for Christ. He was reading the Bible, meeting a pastor to pray, and was concerned about Bible study. She was delighted to see him grow, because she had known the Lord for a long time, and cherished the assurance that he was taking these steps. The pain of his death had been difficult for her, but now she was concerned, as he had been, for his children and what it would mean for she and her husband to raise them. Just as her son had done, she took my hand and asked, "Would you pray with me?"

As we prepared to deboard, both of us were very encouraged. I remarked to her how God takes our lives and puts all the pieces together so perfectly, even the way He arranged for us to sit together. Then she looked at me and said, "You know, this wasn't my seat. Just before you came on the plane a woman asked me to change seats with her."



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DISCUSS

What will help me to recognize my given opportunities?

What will help me to respond to my opportunities?



CONSIDER

What were the circumstances that God had to orchestrate for this opportunity to occur?

What did John have to do in order to seize the opportunity?
What were the benefits of his doing so?

What's at stake if I say, "No, God has no plan for me here"?

TRY THIS

Identify one area of life in which God may be giving you divine opportunities.

What's at stake if I say, "Yes, God has a plan for me here"?

NO

YES

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose." —Jim Elliot

"There has never yet been a man in our history who led a life of ease whose name is worth remembering." —Theodore Roosevelt

"The wise man does not expose himself needlessly to danger, since there are few things for which he cares sufficiently; but he is willing, in great crisis, to give even his life—knowing that under certain conditions it is not worthwhile to live." —Aristotle

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are taken from the *New International Version*, ©1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Published by Zondervan Bible Publishers, Grand Rapids, Michigan.



REFLECT

What is my next step?