

Opportunities

Preparing for the future; stay in the arena

Steve Durham—March 25, 2023

Greetings from Indianapolis. Very happy to be here. Last week (March 12) we had an elder's conference, and I'll just tell you that it was the best elder's conference we've ever had. It was very good!

What I saw and heard I want to pass on to you. What really stuck with me was an additional opportunity that presented itself to the Church during that conference.

The entire Church, not just the elders, but the entire Church. It was an opportunity for us to continue to move forward and benefit from the labors of those who have come before. What I mean by that is, basically Fred and all the writing, research, speaking, books, booklets, and talents that God has put in Fred.

God has made us all individual, and Fred has some individual talents. Fred has allowed God to use him! He's submitted to that and he's been very willing to use those talents. God has taken that and it's benefited the Church. That's the laborers who have gone before. There's a foundation that has been built and that is built on Christ.

- Col. 2:19 says that Christ is the Head of the Church
- Eph. 2:20 says that He's the Foundation, the Cornerstone

That's what we build on!

Fred had built on that, and now we have literature, this wonderful literature more than any other organization. We have reams of books, CDs, sermons, etc. We're branching out and building on that.

This is an additional opportunity for us to continue to move forward in the Church and benefit from the laborers who have gone before us.

Quote by Benjamin Disraeli:

{https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/benjamin_disraeli_129996}

The secret of success is to be ready when your opportunity comes.

I do believe that this is an opportunity that's coming to all of us. Of course, you have to take advantage and recognized it. You have to have the energy and the desire to go ahead and take it, to take advantage of the opportunity. Missed opportunities go nowhere! They become lost and don't come around again.

I can remember one time in Indianapolis years ago in Worldwide Church of God that there was somebody in the congregation that was sick and they made the announcement that they were in the hospital down the road and were asking for a visit. We left and about Tuesday of that week I can remember driving by the hospital and saw the door and a parking spot and I had about an hour and half before my next meeting, and I just kept driving. I didn't go up, didn't go in. It really bothered me, and as you can see I remember it to this day.

By my not taking that opportunity to go up there, the Spirit was leading me, and Rom. 8 talks about the 'sons of God are led by the Holy Spirit.' It was telling me that there was someone up there that needed to be visited and I didn't do it.

There is the parable of the talents, and we know that a man buried his talent and it was given away to the one who had more.

There are the five foolish virgins; they missed an opportunity *big time!* They knocked on the door, the door was shut, and they were not allowed to go in. Another one of missed opportunities in God's Word.

God gives us these reminders that we need to grab our opportunity when it comes; to step up, take hold of it, and do what is laid in front of us.

Matthew 7:18: "A good tree cannot produce evil fruit, nor can a corrupt tree produce good fruit. Every tree *that is* not producing good fruit is cut down and is cast into the fire. Therefore, you shall assuredly know them by their fruits" (vs 18-20).

You have to take hold of a good opportunity and that will bear fruit ***IF*** you put it in God's hands and you're led by the Spirit, and it's good works. Works of that Spirit through you, through Christ working in you.

Verse 21: "Not everyone who says to Me 'Lord, Lord' shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but the one who is doing the will of My Father, Who *is* in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy through Your name? And *did we not* cast out demons through Your name? And *did we not* perform many works of power through Your name?'" (vs 21-22).

That's happening: people think they're doing these things and they're doing these things and 'we're on board, we're okay because we're doing these things.'

Verse 23: “And then I will confess to them, **‘I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who work lawlessness.’** Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and practices them...” (vs 23-24)

Takes the opportunity to do what they hear; be a doer of the Word. Do the opportunity that is set before us. Then we’ll have the benefit that comes.

“...I will compare him to a wise man, who built his house upon the Rock” (v 24)—*Jesus Christ*:

- the Cornerstone of the building
- the wise Architect
- the Master Builder
- the Potter

Christ is busy; He says, ‘I work and My Father works.’ They’re not sitting back in a corner somewhere. He’s hands on with you and me, and with the Church. He knows what’s happening with the Church. That’s what makes these opportunities so valuable and important.

I’ve learned that opportunities are never lost; someone will take the ones you miss.
—Andy Rooney

{<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/178267-i-ve-learned-that-opportunities-are-never-lost-someone-will>}

Doesn’t that remind you of the crown being lost, that Christ said in Rev. 3, ‘let no one take your crown.’

Every minute we spend worrying about the future and regretting the past is a minute we miss in our appointment with life. A missed opportunity to engage life and to see that each moment gives us a chance to change for the better. Isn’t that what we’re about? To experience peace and joy?

Christ said, ‘My peace I leave with you.’ We experience that by:

- being active
- being in the arena
- being in there and doing the things laid before us

We have an opportunity now, another building block to the church.

There were many things that happened in the conference, but this is the one that really stuck out with me, it think it shocked everyone. It showed everyone that we are not sitting still. That Fred is not done, and Jonathan is planning and thinking.

Proverbs 29:18: “Where *there is* no vision, the people perish...”

It takes thought! God gives some visionaries in the Church, the Body. They look and see, plan

and schedule for the future. The fact that there are exciting opportunities for all of us in this, for the future for you and me, the elders and the members. Whether you are widow, a widower, single, married couple, young or old, or an elder, it doesn’t matter. We’re all sheep!

Psa. 23^[transcriber’s correction] says that ‘we are the sheep of His pasture’ and Christ is the Good Shepherd. He also is the Lamb of God, so He was a Sheep and a Shepherd; He understands what we go through. He’s planning; He has a plan for us for the future and for each of us individually and for the Church.

Matthew 16:18^[transcriber’s correction]: “I will build My Church, and *the* gates of the grave shall not prevail against it.”

That’s a promise that the Church is always going to be here. Why are we worried sometimes? Fred mentioned in the conference: **‘What are you going to do when I’m gone?’** He’s brought it out and has done it before. It’s a subject that he talks about. That shows that he’s a wise steward of the possession that God has given him. What’s going to happen when he’s gone?

God has allowed Fred to produce all these, and through Fred God has given us this library or wealth of accurate Truth. I made a trip to Hollister to pick up everything we have, because I deem it very important. That was very important for me to have that. It should be important for you, too. We should be studying and meditating on it, ingesting it and making it part of our lives; walking in it and doing it.

That’s an opportunity for us to have good grass, good feed from the Shepherd, and good water, clear crystal water that we can drink and be refreshed, and grow in grace and knowledge so that we come to the ‘fullness of the measure of the stature of Jesus Christ. *That’s the whole point!*

The Church is where we have that fortress, that place out of the storm that we can come to and worship and be fellowshiping with one another.

Fred and Jonathan revealed in the elder’s conference telling us about all the elders are going to have an opportunity to speak 30 minutes before the live steam. You’re going to hear from all the elders, whoever wants to avail themselves of that opportunity. It’s open for all the elders. It’s a great opportunity for not only the elders, but for you, too. You get the opportunity to hear from those who labor among you, their experiences and what they know and have gone through. You will benefit from that and you’re going to have knowledge that you can put into practice. They’re going to continue to grow and continue to get better. They’re going to

study on their own and grow in that so they can be better speakers, and through God's Holy Spirit be better pastors.

A pastor is someone who cares for the sheep; if they have a small flock they're a pastor. They feed the sheep and give them water, shade, taking care of the burrs and cuts and make sure they walk in the right path, the path of righteousness. They care for the sheep.

A teacher and pastor go together. A teacher is someone who feeds, who knows the Truth well and has studied it and feeds others. God has given us as guides, and you benefit from that.

You are learning to be a teacher, ready to give an answer to the hope that lies within you! That means being ready; that's impromptu. We do something on Go To Meeting that at the end we have discussion, and those questions are answered impromptu. You have to be ready to give an answer.

If you're on there, you get an opportunity to hone your skills, to test, 'iron sharpening iron,' to become sharp in the Word of God. Learning to handle it. Not only the elders, but the individual attendees that are there, the members who are there. And 'all things are decently' and honoring one another; 'decently in order,' not confused. I try to monitor that.

Those are the things that we're going to benefit from, by this opportunity of the elders speaking. We're going to learn several things, we're going to have many, many benefits from all of this. This should be something that's very exciting. It was to me and reminded me of:

2-Timothy 1:6: "For this reason, I admonish you to stir up the gift of God that is in you by the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, **but of power, and of love, and of sound-mindedness**" (vs 6-7).

All of these are things that we will receive and grow in. A sound mind:

- How do you handle the Scriptures?
- How do you understand the Truth?

If you've ever had to give an answer for something and you've never done it before and you hear yourself speak.

Maybe I don't know it as well as I thought, or did I say that!

You find out what you understand, but that through practice we're all going to be teachers someday, everyone of us, all of you out there. You're going to be teachers and guides in the world tomorrow. You're teachers and guides now as people come to you and say, 'You're different, tell me about why

you're different.' You get an opportunity to share that with people as God leads you to do that.

But in the future very much so. We're learning to be kings and priests. If we're not involved in these opportunities, if we don't tune in to the live stream—and we have something else going on—you're going to miss out!

You have an opportunity with Go To Meeting, we have seats for 10,000 people. If you want to come on, just send me an e-mail and I'll set you up. You can come on and be part of that, enjoy that and interact. We have Breaking Bread, which is a Bible study. I put out an invitation last time for everyone.

Of course, we want to do things 'decently and in order' so we have policies and procedures to love, respect and honor one another. That's not been a problem with the Church of God. It has been a couple that get a little outside of that, but for the most part we're very loving and caring for one another, and respectful.

These are opportunities, building blocks of the Church. The Church isn't going away. Just because it's appointed for all men once to die, every one of us, we're all going to die. Fred is concerned about what's going to happen because it's up to us, not up to Fred. If Fred is gone, there's no action or thought in the grave where you go. And it's over for our loved ones, too, that have gone. They don't think, don't praise God, it's over. ***They're awaiting the resurrection!*** Graduation day will come, but they have finished school.

Fred is very wise in his desire to help us prepare of that. God has giving us the tools and the building blocks. Are we taking advantage of it? ***That's the point!*** Are we taking advantage of these opportunities that God gives us?

Verse 8: "Therefore, you should not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner; but jointly suffer with *me for the sake of the Gospel*... [get in there and work, get in there in the arena and fight] ...according to *the* power of God... [the Holy Spirit leading and guiding] ...***Who has saved us and called us with a Holy calling***..." (vs 8-9)—*each and every one of us!*

- What are we doing with it?
- Do we get into times when we're down and don't quite do what we should?
- Do we get lethargic and weary?

That's understandable, but fire up that Spirit and get back in it!

"...not according to our works, **but according to His own purpose**... [tie in Jer. 29:11] and grace... [that we grow in, but we have to avail

ourselves of these opportunities to grow] ...**which was given us in Christ Jesus before the ages of time**" (v 9). *It's always there!*

These new additional developments and opportunities that we have gotten at the conference—and we're going to start seeing on a regular basis on the Sabbath on the live stream—are a source of inspiration and encouragement as we go forward in CBCG.

What's going to happen to CBCG when Fred dies? ***Nobody is like Fred!*** That's true! But nobody is like you and me, because God personally puts us together! He gives us personal traits and abilities that is different from others to be used in the development and the growth of His Church now and in the future.

The skills and abilities of Fred is unbelievable what he's left us. Now we move to another time when God is done with that. He's provided all this and it's there and we move to the next...

I'd just like to say that I pray every day that Fred will live. I don't want to see him go, and Fred doesn't want to see himself go. But we all know that's going to happen. So, we have to be visionaries! We have to look and see. Jonathan and Fred are preparing, and we need to be part of that. ***We need to 'kick it into gear' in our personal lives to be part of the operation to make this happen! To make sure that CBCG doesn't go away!***

God will provide the leadership in each of us. He has His Plan, and He's laying it out now. He's letting us see that we can work together. Look at what happened to the New Testament Church. There were 12 apostles who all worked together. Churches were held in homes, ministers went around and Paul set elders in different areas. *They worked together!*

There were some who came into the leadership roles, but God moved those leadership roles around. They had a conference (Acts 15). They came together to discern what needed to be done. God worked it that way.

They loved one another, worked together. I'm sure they had their personality problems, like any group of humans will have, but with the Holy Spirit being common and one Spirit working together in one Body, it was taken care of. God can do that again!

We just need to be here, pray and ask God, put it in God's hands and ask Him to:

- lead us
- guide us in what we do
- guide Jonathan and each

- guide each and every one of the elders to become leaders
 - ✓ to support one another
 - ✓ to esteem others greater than themselves
 - ✓ to raise others up

When that happens, God blesses our efforts. I've seen that! Raise people up and get out of the way, and God blesses it.

He did it in June 6, 2017 when He inspired Go To Meeting to start. It's been six years now, and God has blessed it. He started live stream and has blessed that! Now He's adding to it, another dimension of bringing all the elders together and allowing them to have an opportunity to speak, and you to get to know them. For you to hear them and benefit from them. And for them to grow in their preparation.

Maybe you will have an elder in the town where you live and didn't know it. Then we get a fellowship group or whatever. There are many blessings from it.

It is a very exciting time that we're running into! There are many other things that we can do. I have some ideas, and we all have ideas and things that God can bless and bring to help grow and widen our effectiveness.

Not in numbers! It's not in numbers, it's in the personal growth. We're the workmanship of Christ. He's the Potter and the wise Architect of the building and House of God and the Church of God, the Church of the Firstborn! ***He is the One Who is doing it!***

These are the building blocks He's given us, but in order for us to benefit from it, we have to take advantage of it; we have to be in the arena, both the speaker and the listener have the opportunity. We increase in the understanding of God's Word and speak the Truth in love (Eph. 4 talks about that).

'Learn to feed My sheep,' Christ told Peter. This is an opportunity:

- to teach the Word,
- to learn the Word
- to learn how to handle the Word—both listener and elder
- to change our lives
- to overcome
- to grow in grace and knowledge

1-Peter 4:10: "*Let each one, according as he has received a gift from God, **be using it to serve the others as good stewards of the grace of God,** which manifests itself in various ways. If anyone speaks, let it be as the words of God...* [not

something else; not brambles, briars and thistles that hurt the sheep] ...if anyone serves... [we should all be doing that, listener and speaker] ...*let it be* as from *the* strength which God supplies; so that in everything, God may be glorified... [that's what we search for and hope for] ...**through Jesus Christ to Whom is the glory and the power into the ages of eternity.** Amen" (vs 10-11).

Colossians 3:17—*what we should be doing on a daily basis*: "And *in* everything—whatever you do in word or in deed—*do* all in *the* name of *the* Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and *the* Father by Him."

Each of us has been given by God certain gifts to be used to edify the Body. We've seen in Fred wonderful gifts, and when he dies God will have something else for us to learn as a Church. ***He'll take care of that!***

We put our trust in Him! We support whatever He does! That's what we do. We support and esteem others better than ourselves. Get in the arena where the action is. Don't sit back!

There are naysayers and people who want to put down, 'Now what are you going to do when Fred dies?' *That's not what is going to be!* That's not what God has in mind! It's not going to happen!

1-Cor. 12 tells us that everybody has something to contribute. It's just a matter of being given the opportunity to do so, ***and right now we have the opportunity!***

I want to read something to you; it's been on wall and it's something I love and I internalize it, and I do everything for glory of God. I get out of the way and ask God to help me to do this: *The Man in the Arena* by Teddy Roosevelt

This could also be called *The Christian in the Arena* or the individual that takes hold of the opportunity that's laid before them. You're always going to have somebody who says they have something else to do, or they don't want to do it.

You have the grasshopper who plays the fiddle and laughs and cuts up and plays music, always a good joker. But when it gets cold he freezes to death, and hears 'I never knew you.' He doesn't take an opportunity seriously; never jumps in and commits himself.

Now *The Man in the Arena*, and think about if this is you. If it isn't, maybe it should be you:

Teddy Roosevelt—April 23, 1910: ***The Man in the Arena***

{<https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Learn-About-TR/TR-Encyclopedia/Culture-and-Society/Man-in-the-Arena>}

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.

We know that we will ***if we strive, stay in the arena and give it everything we have!*** We ask God to forgive us for failings and errors, and He does through the blood of Christ, reconciled and redeemed, make justified like Christ.

We stick with it, and stay with it! We hold up the hands of the feeble, but also those who are in the arena. We're in there with them, not in the stands criticizing, but in the arena and making the changes.

We have an opportunities before us; ***take them!*** Ask God to lead and guide you in them. Put them in His hands and trust in Him. Ask Him what you can to do physically, ***and trust in Him for the spiritual outcome! He will do it and it will work!***

This was a great and wonderful conference! Think about what's coming, and when you see that 30 minute section, listen and get to know these guys, those that labor among you. Learn and grow from them, and let's internalize and be part of—all of us—be one in the Body of Christ and CBCG

Scriptural References:

- 1) Matthew 7:18-27
- 2) Proverbs 29:18
- 3) Matthew 16:18
- 4) 2 Timothy 1:6-9
- 5) 1 Peter 4:10
- 6) Colossians 3:17

Scriptures referenced, not quoted:

- Colossians 2:19
- Ephesians 2:20
- Romans 8
- Revelation 3
- Psalm 23

- Jeremiah 29:11
- Acts 15
- Ephesians 4
- 1 Corinthians 12

Also referenced: Quotes:

- Benjamin Disraeli:
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- Andy Rooney
{<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/178267-i-ve-learned-that-opportunities-are-never-lost-someone-will>}
- Teddy Roosevelt—April 23, 1910: ***The Man in the Arena***
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