

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF GOD'S OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUR BUSINESS

By: Bruce Strom

Why are you in business? Is it just a random, lucky circumstance? Or might there be a divine purpose?

Some people believe in random luck. Certain atoms randomly collided creating a big bang that sent debris hurtling across space. The debris randomly stopped at the perfect axis to create conditions for sustainable life. That life randomly progressed from simple cells to complex humans over billions of years. Those humans are simply decaying cells which in a short time will rot and disappear.

You could agree with them. I don't. I believe in a God that is purposeful, creative, loving and good. He created you to be purposeful, creative, loving and good. One of the primary ways you accomplish this is through work. Your business is not a random happenstance. God provided the needed insights and resources, created the right opportunities, and brought you to this moment in time to advance His kingdom purposes. Do you believe that?

God Says Your Work Matters

The best business book ever written is the Bible. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is about work. Our work was God's idea from the beginning. Our work is a means to glorify Him and serve others. You might miss how important your work is to God. But consider this. Jesus could have chosen many topics to speak on, but more than 60% of his parables deal with work!

We should not be surprised that Jesus spoke so often about business or that He used business as a deeper illustration of the Kingdom of God. Like a parable, work is the story but advancing God's kingdom is the deeper purpose.

Who Owns Your Business

As a young man, I thought business was all about making money to support my family. I graduated from a top 20 law school, worked for a great law firm and soon decided I could make more money if I formed my own law practice.

I worked hard. Multiple office locations, numerous trials, a case that went before the United States Supreme Court, and I was a millionaire by age 30.

But I missed a profound truth. I thought my name was first in the string of names that comprised our law firm. But God should have been first. I thought I was being a good provider, but in failing to recognize that God owned my business and I was his operating partner, I risked everything. Had God left me on that path, I believe I would have destroyed my marriage and estranged my sons, and for what?

Would I lay up treasures on earth or would I store up treasure in heaven? Jesus made it clear that where my treasure was, there would my heart be also. Mt. 6:19-21. Either I could build my kingdom or advance His kingdom. Which would I be about? How about you?

God's Opportunity

I admire David Green, the founder of Hobby Lobby. He wrote a short booklet entitled, "Five Keys to Building a Family Legacy." The key isn't business or family - it's using both to advance God's kingdom. David says it this way, "Family is good, but ultimately God has to be number one. The only antidote for an ingrown family is generosity. Generosity keeps us from becoming overly

focused on ourselves. It reminds us that we are put here on this earth to glorify God and to serve others.”

Glorify God and Serve Others

Jesus tells a story of a traveling merchant from Samaria who glorifies God and serves a neighbor in need. We know this business man as the Good Samaritan. Lk. 10:25-37.

Samaritans were not liked. Today, some people don't like business. They think it is secular and less important than the work of the church. But Jesus demonstrated business was one of the best means of advancing His mission. He chose a traveling businessman and two church leaders on purpose. The church leaders walked past a neighbor in need while the merchant took some risk, stopped and used his resources to see the neighbor restored.

I have a friend named Renee who owns a busy chiropractic clinic. Her husband is a pastor and it was easy for her to fall into the trap that his work was more spiritual than hers. However, Dr. Renee began to see that her business was on the front lines of God's work. People came to her broken and hurting. People like Amy.

Amy's husband left her and their three year old son. Abandoned and confused, Amy felt sick. Her anxiety and fear created tension and migraines. Renee could help her headache but not her heartache. For that, Amy needed legal help.

Renee knew “If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God's love be in that person?” 1 Jn. 3:17 NLT.

The Legal Crisis in America

You can understand Amy's challenge. Struggling to make ends meet, she is one in three Americans who cannot

afford an attorney. We've all heard the phrase “you have the right to a free attorney”, but that is only true if you are charged with a crime. If you are a victim of abuse, abandonment or face civil legal issues, you have no such right. Equal justice under law should be available to all, not just the few who can afford it.

America ranks 98th in the world - behind Russia and China - for providing affordable access to justice. Many seniors, veterans, single moms and others are struggling to make ends meet. Studies show 71% of them face legal challenges but 86% are unable to find help. Every second in America someone is unable to access justice.

Receiving a summons or IRS notice is enough to make any of us queasy. When that person is vulnerable due to age, health, or money, the issue is overwhelming.

God's Heart for Justice

God sees Amy and her son. Psalm 146:9 tells us, “The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.” We know God is the perfect judge and will ultimately make all things right, but he invites us to do justice now. “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” Mic. 6:8

Justice for the poor is the second most prominent theme in Scripture with more than 2,000 verses. The first is idolatry. Both are lessons for business.

I made an idol of my law practice. Money, position and power were my idols. They subtly crept into my heart without me noticing. Idols crowd out God. Idols create “Pharisees” who believe they are always right and know what is best. God chose suffering to break the idols of my heart.

Helen and I could not have children. We suffered through seven torturous years of rising hope and cascading despair. But when all hope was lost, God was there. We first met our twin sons on an ultrasound machine when they were only peanuts with beating hearts a few weeks old. Leaving the doctor that day, we saw a double rainbow in the sky. Months later on the eve of the boys' birth, we were celebrating with family and friends when the entire restaurant including the kitchen staff went outside. There in the sky was the brightest double rainbow I have ever seen.

I don't know what challenges you may be facing. Perhaps God has brought you through some difficult circumstances. He is faithful. He keeps his promises. We emerge stronger because he has a bigger purpose for us. My suffering allowed me to see the suffering in others. Suffering in men like Jonathan.

Rescuing Jonathan

Jonathan was homeless. He was charged with trespassing for trying to keep warm in a grocery store. A social service agency referred Jonathan to me. I asked if I could take him to breakfast before court. Over breakfast I learned Jonathan had a Master's Degree. He had a great job, family and home. But everything fell apart when his company was bought out and he lost his job. Too embarrassed to tell his wife, he'd get dressed up and go look for work. When no work was found, bills mounted, lawsuits came and the home went into foreclosure. One day he returned home to an empty house. He never knew where his wife and children went. He ended up on the streets and turned to alcohol.

Jonathan told me people passed him by. He felt despised. I thought of another homeless man I knew who was despised and rejected by men. A man of sorrows and suffering and we esteemed him not. Isa. 53. I told Jonathan about Jesus and over breakfast, Jonathan accepted Jesus as His savior. We went to court and had

the charges dismissed and I connected him with a local church. Jonathan would become a vibrant part of that church.

Seeing the impact the gospel and justice can have in someone's life, I started a legal ministry called Administer Justice. I came to understand that my skills were given to me so I could serve others.

God's Plans

Honestly I did not come to that understanding easily. I'm a proud, strong-willed man. Shortly after the boys were born, I found myself in the midst of several lawsuits, two buildings I was trying to purchase fell through and two new attorney hires came apart. God has different callings for each of us. I was running from mine. Like a man named Jonah, I found myself in the midst of a great storm. I told my partners and firm that I was leaving the practice to run Administer Justice full time.

Like Jonah, I sat alone in a small confined 8x10 space. At least it was lighter and less smelly than the inside of a big fish. My idols were dashed. I had no title, no money, and no power. My wife stayed home with the boys and it would be several years before I would earn enough money to be above our poverty guidelines.

Sometimes God has to bring us to the end of ourselves so He can use us to advance His purposes.

Obedience brings growth

Over twenty years have passed. Administer Justice grew to serve more than 50,000 neighbors in need with a large staff, several offices, hundreds of volunteer lawyers and hundreds more volunteers. We received World Magazine's National Hope for Effective Compassion

Award because of our innovative approach to empowering hurting neighbors. Moody published my book Gospel Justice so others could see the impact of legal ministry. Today, there are over 100 neighborhoods with gospel justice ministries in them. Will you help us add one more?

Ask yourself my friend Joe Abraham's question, "What can I do to have the most impact?" Joe wrote the book Entrepreneurial DNA and has built many successful businesses. As he says, "Supporting great missions around the world is great - but who is going to meet the justice needs of your employees, customers, and community?"

How to make the most of God's opportunity for your business

Not many people know this, but the concept of providing legal help for those who could not afford attorneys began with business leaders. A group of German business men in New York City in the 1880's saw fellow German immigrants being taken advantage of in housing, loans, and other contracts. They needed help but could not afford it. The business owners pooled their resources to hire a lawyer to help. I believe business can again lead the way.

Rescue and Restore Neighbors

Not-for-profits are created for public good versus private gain. But for too long they have relied on the same old fundraisers and ongoing donor support. Why not adopt a model of self-sufficiency? Why not operate more like a business for public good.

Dr. Renee saw the transformation in Amy. She saw how replicable that was. As she said, "That my husband and I

could take \$5,000 and influence an entire population of people is amazing."

Like Dr. Renee, you can give \$5,000 to Administer Justice. We serve as project manager of those funds for a new ministry site location. That site could be a small church in an under-resourced community. For Renee, it was an under-resourced community in Chicago. The investment is one-time as these ministries become self-sustaining through the collection of small client administrative fees. The fee provides dignity to the client while ensuring some buy-in. While small, it is sufficient to cover the ongoing cost. What is needed is the funds to launch.

As project managers, we help assemble the necessary site team. Every team needs a leader and we call this person a "justice champion". Most often, this person is a female lawyer or older male lawyer. We work with this person to assemble a support team providing hospitality to welcome clients and watch children, intake, client advocacy to connect clients with legal, spiritual and social resources, prayer and phone follow-up. This team makes it easy for attorneys to volunteer while providing comprehensive service to clients.

Your one-time launch funds allow us to train the lawyers and support team, pay for insurance, provide an online database system for tracking impact, orientation and an annual conference, a banner, web site and the supplies they need for the first year of operation.

No on-going donations or dinners to attend. Small investment, maximum impact. The average gospel justice center will help 100 clients in the first year providing \$70,000 in savings to the community and \$300,000 in donated legal services. That impact will increase for years into the future!

Serving the Least of These

Beyond giving, this is an opportunity for employees and your family to serve.

Bake cookies together. Your kids can hang out with children waiting for parents. My sons grew up this way. My wife helped with intake, interpreted and served in other ways.

Perhaps serving is not possible. Praying is. We send reports to you from the ministry so you can join in prayer and praise for what God is doing because of your generosity.

You might be able to launch a new ministry location every year or every two, three or five years. Whether this ministry or another, my prayer is for you to **see your business as mission and not merely money.**

I would love to talk further with you.

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