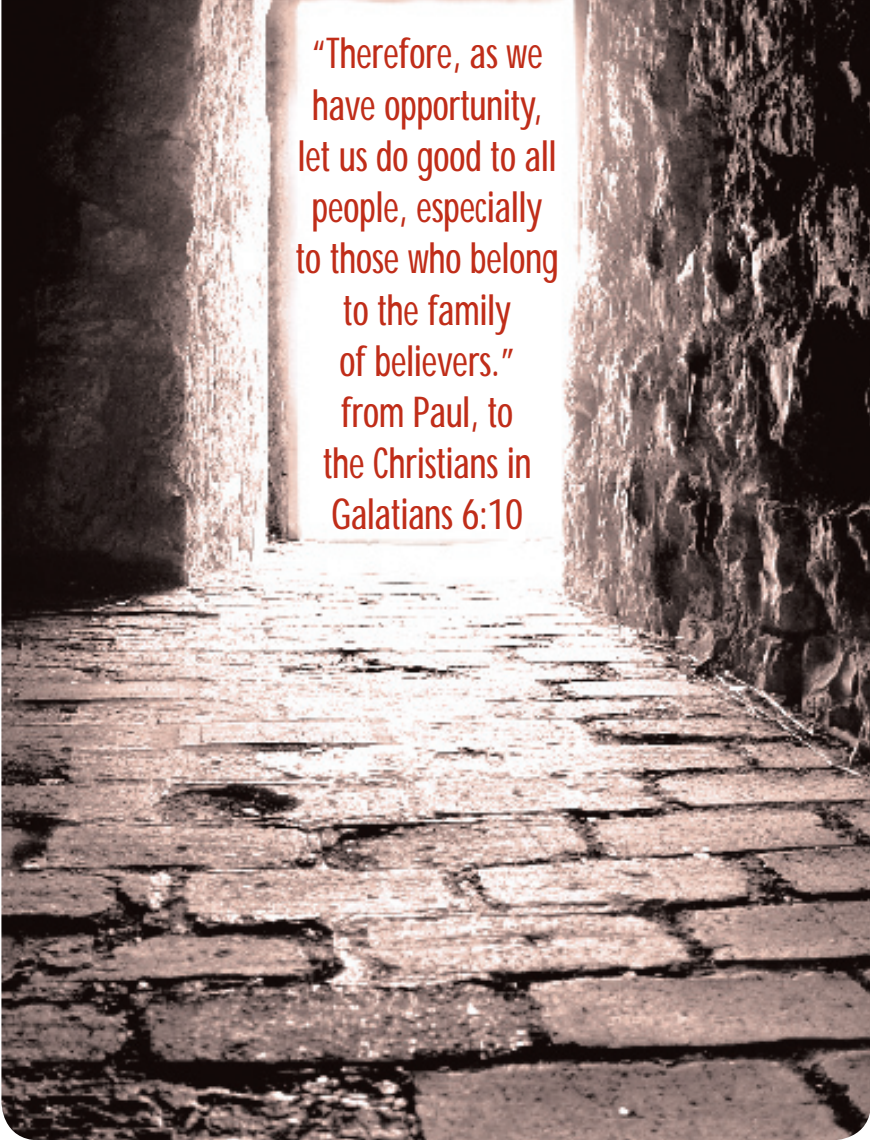


don't miss this opportunity

John Thew writes.



“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”
from Paul, to the Christians in Galatians 6:10

let us do good . . .

Every day and everywhere in our sad and lost world there are opportunities – indeed obligations – to live for the God who has saved us. I'm not talking about the unusual or the occasional! This is about everyday Christian living, the witness of our lives transformed by Christ, our platform of credibility for speaking about God's offer of forgiveness and a fresh start in Christ. In Peter's first letter he is clear that even amongst those who resist God, our Christian lives and witness will attract attention; sometimes in the form of opposition and strife, sometimes in questions and enquiry, (1 Peter 3.14–16). Opportunities are life. Life is opportunity.

do good to all people . . .

Nepal is the only Hindu kingdom in the world. Fifty years ago there was no church, and all attempts at preaching the gospel or baptising converts were severely punished. This did not put off groups like UMN (United Mission to Nepal), who systematically set about doing good in the country, initiating various projects of education, development and self-help. Likewise many Nepali leaders – often new Christians – have lived faithfully and continued to tell the good news of God's life-changing grace. Over 50 years – slowly, painfully, mysteriously, the church has grown; so now there are groups of people meeting around the Word all over the country. The Church is alive and growing. Suffering, yes but growing.

Last year, His Majesty's Government legislated to change the way non-government organisations operate, and so now UMN is working

“as we have opportunity . . .

Saul and Pilar Cruz are opportunists – in the best sense of the word. Twenty years ago they noticed thousands of people living in and around the rubbish dumps of their own Mexico City. Stung and shamed, they started to spend time with these people. Soon, together, they were making plans to address the issues of their lives – poverty, health, education, justice, hopelessness. With several of the community leaders – along with some opposition and plenty of critics – Saul and Pilar started 'Armonia' (Harmony), a project to give these plans legs. Through time spent patiently in the communities, careful

group planning of life-changing practices, classes in life skills, trade training and 'wholeness of life'; they have seen the transformation of some of the communities, a number of lives changed by Christ, and the growth of a network of churches.

Good people? Clever strategists? Lucky opportunists? Not really. From their days in the Mexican Christian student movement, COMPA, Saul and Pilar knew that there is no greater service, no better place to be, than at God's disposal – available to take up opportunities that he presents.

more closely with local churches and organisations, taking opportunities to act for and speak of Christ.

Even where the gospel is officially or unofficially not welcomed, there are wide openings for Christians from all over the world to do good in the name of Christ. In many countries of Asia, local Christians and foreign nationals have been doing their work honestly and well – living and working with integrity, and openly answering questions, without fear and with gentleness and respect (as Peter says). Living for Christ and doing good inevitably attracts attention, some wanted and some not. Inevitably people ask questions – people who have the stirrings of God’s spirit in their lives, and who are looking for something solid on which to build their lives. What an extraordinary ‘good’ to be able to share with people the bread of life!

...especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

In Africa, where the Gospel has taken root over the last century, and where Christians outnumber those in the West, the opportunities to evangelise and tell the good news are present most places; but for foreigners the opportunities to work with local Christian leaders in establishing depth to Christian faith is even more pressing.

One of the problems in Africa, says Kenyan leader Denis Tongoi, is that what is preached and heard on Sundays often does not translate into living for the rest of the week. That is, there is a great gap between doctrine and practice, between head knowledge and daily living. He might

well be talking of the whole world that I know! This problem of nominalism – or hypocrisy – sometimes comes out of a misunderstanding of the gospel (“saying these words will save me!”); sometimes out of ignorance of how the Word of God applies to everyday living by grace; and sometimes simply out of an unwillingness to live out salvation in the world.

As we have opportunity, let us . . . respond by . . .

First, I’ve got to be ready to take up the opportunities God presents me everyday, now, where I am. Obviously I can’t do everything in the world – no Messiah complex please. But I do need to be willing, and to demonstrate good and share the good news with the people I meet.

pray >

God, give me wisdom to know when to listen, when to speak and when to act.

Second, I need to be prayerful about my world and about the wider world. I need to keep pushing out my horizons, to see the world as God sees it. I need to pray that the leaders of CMS keep finding the right opportunities and connections for service, and the right people to fill those opportunities.

pray >

God, expand my vision as you expand my heart.

Third, I need to be generous – in proportion to what God gives me – in support of missionaries, of world mission and of needy brothers and sisters.



pray >

Lord, help me to remember that you are the source of all things, and of life itself.

Finally, I need to be willing to go wherever God calls and equips me to go. Depending on the responsibilities and training God gives me, that could mean to join the ranks of missionaries who go to the four corners of the globe – once confirmed by others, of course! But if not this, then it will certainly mean going back to ‘first, second and third’ – taking every opportunity here and now, praying for the world, and generously supporting the work of God worldwide.

pray >

God, move me to the place I should be in your service.

“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

Galatians 6:10



John Thew is the Federal Secretary of CMS-Australia.