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Summer meditations

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Chapter 1: *Wisdom*

Summer has two contradictory personalities. On the one hand, it's a season meant for hard work—just watch a farmer or a rancher sweating from sunup to sundown during the hot summer months. On the other hand, we tend to associate summer with relaxation; the pleasant weather lends itself to vacations and rest. It takes wisdom to know how to balance these two conflicting summer trends. The wise person will recognize both opportunities and maximize each. This is the wisdom of summer: taking advantage of the opportunities life presents to us instead of letting them slip by unseen.



We desperately need this brand of wisdom. We face opportunities to grow and to help others grow every day, but we don't always recognize them. Even when we do recognize them, it's much easier to make excuses or put off action than it is to make these opportunities fruitful.

When a husband or wife comes home from work, he or she has within his or her grasp a

golden opportunity to nourish the love that every family needs simply by giving undivided attention. How often, unfortunately, does our own exhaustion and worry blind us from seeing this chance?

When someone gifted with creativity gets a sharp new idea about how to make his parish, workplace, or community better, that also is an opportunity. It's a chance to make this world a better place while at the same time fulfilling one's own potential. Too often though, another voice takes over. That voice starts to complain about how hard it will be to make a change and all the obstacles that will have to be overcome. This voice of fear and sloth often convinces us to see golden opportunities as mere pipe dreams.



It's funny how certain regrets never really go away, even seemingly insignificant ones. I was the cocaptain of the varsity football team during my senior year of high school. The previous year we had had resounding success. We were named one of the best teams in the city and only lost one game that year. But my senior year got off to a slow start. After losing our first few games, triumph turned to discouragement and desperation in the locker room. As cocaptain, I felt I needed to do something about it. I had to show some leadership and help turn things around. But I

didn't know how. Then an opportunity presented itself.

We were playing a local rival, and our offense was off to a good start in the first quarter. I was a running back, but I was also playing linebacker on defense, so I was pretty tired. I knew I wasn't a good linebacker. In fact, it was a new position for me.

As the first half unfolded, I saw a pattern emerging. We would have a few good drives on offense, but then I would get tired and we would stall. At halftime I got an idea. If the coach would take me out on defense and substitute me with our quarterback—a much better linebacker than me—I believed we had a better shot at slowing the opposition's offensive momentum. I remember I actually felt excited about this idea. My heartbeat got faster and I experienced a surge of energy. So I turned and looked for the coach to share my idea. But when I saw him, I stopped. I thought to myself that he had probably already come up with the same idea and dismissed it, that he would resent my interference, that he had too much on his mind already. So I never said a thing.

I don't know if it was as brilliant an idea as I thought, but we'll never know. We lost that game and every other game that year. Ever since, I've wondered what would have happened if I had shared that idea with the coach; if I'd done *something* with the opportunity that idea created.

Making It Your Own

- † Choose one sentence from this chapter that really resonated in your heart or compose a one-sentence summary. Write it on a sticky note. Put it where you will see it throughout the week as a reminder that wisdom involves taking advantage of opportunities.
- † Take time this week to reflect prayerfully on some past opportunities you didn't take advantage of. Ask yourself why you let them pass by. Put a name on the reasons and influences that moved you to make the wrong decision (or no decision) so you will be able to recognize them if they try to disrupt you again.
- † Achieving a good rhythm of work and rest in today's world isn't easy. Innumerable sources of entertainment and distraction are at our fingertips, and there's no limit to how many hours we can spend at the office. It's up to each one of us to find a healthy balance. Do you tend to be a procrastinator or a workaholic? Do you choose relaxation to the detriment of responsibility? Are you hyper-responsible and unable to relax? Write down the patterns of your life and choose to make at least one adjustment this week to improve.

- † Reflect on this: What opportunities are presenting themselves to me now, in this season of my life? How am I responding to them? Choose one and make a commitment to respond to it.
- † Reflect on the important people in your life. Do you feel that one is squandering an opportunity? Invite him or her out for a cup of coffee (or ice cream, or lunch) and try to give the individual encouragement, even if all that means is listening to the person's worries and concerns.

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