

I was so focused on what I wanted that I almost missed what was eternally important

My sister called me that Wednesday afternoon. "Dixon," she said, "Mitchel wants to see you."

"Wow, sis," I said, "Is he conscious?"

"Most of the time," she replied. "When he is awake, he asks to see you."

"OK," I said, "I'll try to get over this afternoon; I am just so busy!"

As I hung up the phone, my thoughts went back more than 5 years. Mitchel had called me and wanted to see me. "Buddy, I always have time for you," I replied, "Come on."

Mitchel was a Lieutenant on our city's police force. He had been in the force for nearly 30 years and had received numerous commendations and awards. So, I was a bit surprised when he sat down on the couch in my office and said, "They're going to lock me up, Dixon. I'm a cop! I can't go to jail!" He went on to tell me about his business venture, but he had not declared the income. "They don't want to lock you up, Mitchel," I replied. "They just want you to pay your taxes. Bring in all your receipts, all the payroll, everything, and we'll reconstruct the business and give you data to negotiate with. You've got to pay your taxes, Mitchel!" I continued, "plus you'll have to pay a penalty also. But don't worry about jail. It's not going to happen. The IRS just wants its money."

He returned the next afternoon with a big cardboard box overflowing with loose receipts and timecards. I took one look at that box; without saying a word, I walked out of my office, across the hall to the controller's office, and asked for help. While my controller was organizing the receipts and checking that he had everything he needed, Mitchel and I sat in my office and caught up on family news. After a little bit, I asked him what his relationship to Jesus was.

"Dixon," he replied. "Something happened a long time ago. I don't want to talk about it."

"Mitchel," I said, "if you ever get to the point where you want to talk about it, call me. I'm here for you. I want to talk about it when you're ready." He said OK and left.

I didn't make it over that Wednesday. I was too tired at the end of the day and just didn't feel like going. That evening, I told my wife about the phone call and promised myself that I would go see Mitchel tomorrow.

Thursday, my sister called again. "Dixon," she said, "Mitchel is asking to see you." At the time, I was president of a restaurant company, and there was absolutely nothing that I could not have postponed to make time to visit Mitchel at the hospital. But I told her I was

too busy. I'll try to come by tonight, on the way home. But I didn't. A couple of late phone calls distracted me.

The next morning, as I was leaving for work, I told my wife I didn't care if the place was burning down. I'm going to visit Mitchel today. I really meant to! I decided I would go over around noon. But when noon came, I was working on a project that was intensely interesting, and I began to rationalize postponing my visit to him on the way home.

At that moment, as I began to think it would be ok to postpone again, my sister called. It was the third day in a row that she called me. I picked up the phone and heard for the third time, "Dixon, Mitchel is asking for you." However, this time she added, "He really wants to see you!" I finally realized that the call was, in reality, from God. I closed the project I was working on, turned off my computer, and walked out the door.

When I arrived at Mitchel's room at the hospital, they told me, "You can't stay in the room for long. He is very weak." Mitchel was suffering from Crohn's disease, emphysema, COPD, and heart failure. He couldn't talk very well as he would take a breath, then gasp out one word. Each word required its own breath. Each word was barely audible. I needed to lean down close and concentrate to understand what he was trying to say.

I walked into his room; a nurse was there changing his medication. There was 'that' machine in there, beeping, each beep letting you know that his heart had just achieved one more contraction, letting you know he was still living. He was very quiet, lying on his side, so I walked up to the side of the bed he was facing, pulled up a chair, and sat down. I apologized for taking so long to come to see him. I probably made some lame excuse about being so busy. He tried to smile and said he was glad to see me.

I talked with him briefly and told him about the family. He wanted to know how Bonnie, my wife, was doing. Mitchel always had a soft spot in his heart for Bonnie. He thought she was pretty, he respected the way she treated me, and he liked her. Then I asked him the same question I had asked over five years ago.

"Mitchel," I said, "What is your relationship to Jesus?"

"Dixon," he gasped, one word per gasp, "Something happened a long time ago. I don't want to talk about it."

"Sir," the nurse interrupted, "you need to leave."

I stood up to leave; as I did, I told Mitchel I would be praying for him, that I would bring Bonnie with me, and that I would be back Saturday. I walked out of the room, spent the next few minutes visiting with my sister and the family, then went back to work.

That night, Bonnie and I talked about it and prayed for Mitchel. The next morning in my devotional time, as I was praying for Mitchel, God gave me something to say to him. I wasn't sure I was bold enough to say it, but I would try.

We walked into his hospital room, and as soon as he spotted Bonnie, a big grin broke out on his face, and he gasped out, "Hi, Bonnie!" She walked over to the bed, held his hand, and caressed his forehead. She told him we loved him and that we were praying for him.

When she finished, I sat down, prayed for courage and grace, and began, "Mitchel, you have cheated your wife, you have cheated your kids, and you have cheated yourself. You know this is true. But Mitchel," I continued, "Don't cheat Jesus. Please, just don't cheat Jesus. He loves you; he died for you, and even now, he wants to save you. Please, Mitchel, don't cheat Jesus." He was quiet; he didn't open his eyes or respond. I wasn't sure if he had slipped back into a coma. I said I would be praying for him and turned to leave.

Mitchel's wife stopped me. She wanted to ask about the money he had from his pension and life insurance policy. I was just a bit distressed by the nature and timing of the question. But as she continued to block my exit, something inside my heart told me to look back. I did, and Mitchel was staring at me. I leaned down and asked him if he wanted to ask me something.

He gasped out, "How?" At first, I didn't understand what he was asking. But he kept persisting until I realized, "Are you asking me how to ask Jesus in your heart?" He nodded yes, and I had the privilege of sharing the Good News about Jesus with him. We prayed, and the nurse ushered me out of the room again.

The next day was Sunday. After church, Bonnie and I drove back to the hospital. When we entered his room, nurses and doctors were feverishly working to get him stabilized. However, he saw us, and in the clearest, strongest voice, I heard him say, "Dixon, thank you so much!" One hour later, he died.

I learned a lesson from this experience. I don't think I truly learned it until years later, but I was taught to embrace the interruption, which creates a major problem for most of us because it means putting our plans on hold.

An interruption is having your plans disturbed

Many of us start every day with a plan for how we will spend it and what we need to accomplish. Sometimes that plan is defined for us, as in our work. We know what time we are supposed to show up and generally what time we get off. After work, we often have other things we either need or want to get done, like the kids' soccer practice, meeting with

friends, or grocery shopping. Planning is a good and necessary part of life. However, rigid adherence to our plans will often prevent us from participating in what God is doing.

In the previous story, sirens were blaring; a flashing neon stop sign was telling me to stop; you could even say I was getting phone calls from heaven to change! However, I was so determined to do what I wanted to do that I was turning a deaf ear and a blind eye to all the signals God was sending. But Jesus had a totally different perspective and said of himself:

“For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.”
(John 6:38, NIV)

Jesus thought interruptions were a privilege to do kingdom work

When writing his account of Jesus’s life, the evangelist Luke focused on the many events in Jesus’s life that merged the supernatural with daily life.