

LIVING  
IT OUT



**DAILY  
BIBLE  
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

# Open Hands – Blessed

February 1, 2021

The last month has been a journey as we delved into what it means to live a blessed life, something that I think we all desire. We've learned that we experience God's best when we give him our first and that a blessed life starts in the heart. Over the weekend, Lead Pastor Ben Snyder wrapped up the series by talking about how God blesses an open hand more than a closed fist—a truth that resonates deeply with me as I try to grow in this area.

Ben shared in his message that we have to be *open* to the part God wants us to play. For me, friction arises at the word “open.” There's an uncertainty that comes as soon as we relax our grip and surrender to God's plan, as though we think maintaining a firm, closed hand means we retain control over the direction of our lives or actions. We have a wriggling fear of God steering us away from the path we'd prefer.

In truth, that's a possibility. God might call us to give up something we'd rather keep, do something we'd rather avoid, or move in a direction we'd rather shun. He might not miraculously take away the issues in our lives, but instead, invite us to grow through dealing with them. In Isaiah, we see that our plans do not always coincide with God's.

## **Isaiah 55:8-9**

*<sup>8</sup> “For my thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the LORD. “And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. <sup>9</sup> For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.”*

But our concerns about surrendering to God's desires for us ignore a critical fact: *God's plan is always better.* Not easy, mind you, but deeply worth it. By releasing control to God, we open ourselves to him, allowing him to weave our lives together in a richer and more satisfying way than we could have imagined. The Bible assures us of God's goodness in his orchestration of our lives.

## **Jeremiah 29:11**

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”*

We don't have to fear releasing our grip and surrendering to the part God calls us to play. Obedience will undoubtedly lead us well outside our comfort zones, but we can confidently trust God's loving wisdom. The small, sometimes hesitant, display of trust that comes with opening our hand will ultimately lead us toward a blessed life that's even better than we could have envisioned.

### **Questions:**

Would you describe your posture toward God's callings as closed or open? Why do you have that attitude? Are there areas in your life that God is asking you to surrender to him?

### **Next Steps:**

Identify the areas of your life wherein you need to release control to God. Ask him to guide you in this process. Join a Group to gain support as you grow your trust in God and pursue the part he has called you to play.

### **Prayer:**

*Dear heavenly Father, you are the author of my life, and your plans for me are always good. Help my trust in you to flourish as I live with open hands to the part you call me to play. Thank you for your everlasting kindness and patience. Amen.*

# When it Doesn't Make Sense - Blessed

February 2, 2021

Sometimes when God asks us to do something, it doesn't make sense. Eighteen years ago, Kevin and I took our youth group on a mission trip to the Dominican Republic. While we were there, we immediately felt *at home* in this unfamiliar country. We fell in love with the people, with the land, and with the ministry. We quickly felt a pull and a yearning to be a part of the work that God was doing there. During that trip, we stayed up late into the night talking and praying about whatever it was that God was doing in our hearts as our 6-week-old, youngest child slept on the bed next to us.

We returned home and continued to intentionally seek God. At that time, Kevin had a great job as a youth pastor, I was a stay-at-home mom, we had a cute little house, and our families were less than an hour's drive away. We would have to sell our home and most of our possessions. We would have to travel 1,800 miles with three little ones to a location where only one of us spoke the language. We would have to raise financial support for our missionary income.

Were we experiencing mission trip "warm fuzzies," or was God truly calling our little family—with three kiddos, five and younger—to move overseas? We confided in some close friends who began praying for God to provide us with clarity. Our parents weren't on board (at first). In fact, another family member threatened to report us to child services (I wish I was joking). It didn't make sense.

In his weekend message, Lead Pastor Ben Snyder taught us that "if we want to live life with an open hand, we need to ***be open to trust God even when it doesn't make sense.***" Ben shared a story from Luke when Jesus asked his disciples to do something that didn't make sense—to feed 5,000+ people with their meager provisions.

## **Luke 9:13b**

*"But we have only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.*

Jesus' request didn't make sense.

Our first response to the call to serve in the Dominican Republic was similar to that of the disciples—in the flesh, with normal resources, and under normal

circumstances—it didn't make sense. We pointed out all of our excuses to God, and he graciously replied, *"Trust me."*

That is what he called the disciples to do, and that is what he called us to do 18 years ago. And so, that is what we did. One step at a time.

Over the years, God has continued to call us to play a part in what he is doing to reach others with the good news of Jesus. Often it doesn't make sense, including when we helped start a church 12 years ago. It is amazing to see what God does, though, when we trust him and offer our lives to him open handedly.

**Questions:**

Have you ever felt God asking you to do something that didn't make sense? What was your first reaction? In what ways can you step out in faith even if it doesn't make sense?

**Next Steps:**

If you feel that God is calling you to something, trust him one step at a time. Confide in some close friends or your Group to join you on the journey through prayer. Whether it's to move overseas or share a meal with a neighbor, trusting and following God may not always make sense, but it is always worth it.

**Prayer:**

*God, we want to live with an open hand and trust you, even when it doesn't make sense. Help us to trust you and take one step at a time, knowing you have a plan, just like you did when you fed a crowd of 5,000 with only five loaves of bread and two fish. Open our ears and give us willing hearts to follow your plan and live out our mission for you while we're here on this earth. In Jesus' name, amen.*

# Wanting More of What You Need - Blessed

February 3, 2021

My children have a better life than my siblings and I had growing up. Well, let me rephrase that sentence: They have more than we had. And yet, they always WANT more, but we are teaching them to appreciate what they have. For instance, a choice between having spaghetti, hotdogs, or chicken nuggets seems like plenty of quality options for a child-friendly lunch. Those choices might be fine on Monday, but the rest of the week, I'm met with sighs, grunts, or a, "Why can't we go to (fill in the restaurant)?"

At a certain age, the complaints from the older children require more of a "reality check" response. I share with them how my mother often created a feast with a few potatoes, an onion, and ketchup. Or how she wouldn't dare waste milk on making hot chocolate or tomato soup. She raised us to appreciate the small things. And although we may not have had a lot, we weren't without.

Lead Pastor Ben Snyder said, "Sometimes we get closed-hearted and closed-minded because we look at what we have and think, 'It's just not enough.'" All of us must be open to offering God what we have instead of focusing on what we lack.

I used to think a broken marriage, multiple sclerosis, and a lack of money would have given my Mom justification to think that she had had enough of not having enough. There were days when her spirit was broken, and she lacked strength. Sometimes, a little faith was all she had to offer to God. Thankfully, he used that to make an eternal difference in her life, which she used to make a difference in mine.

As I said, we're teaching our kids to appreciate what they have, but we're also encouraging them to want more of what they NEED. I felt so proud when our oldest daughter stepped toward fulfilling that need when she recently decided to get baptized.

## Questions:

When have you experienced God using your or someone else's "not enough" to make a difference? Do you trust that God gives you what you need? Do you find yourself wanting more of the wrong things? Are you open to giving God what you have?

**Next Steps:**

Practice giving to God first. Take GrowthTrack to unlock your spiritual gifts and understand your purpose. Pray and seek guidance when you feel like what you have isn't enough.

**Prayer:**

*God, help me appreciate the things, the life, and the purpose you have given me. Keep my heart open to share and give as you designed, and help me to remember that you can use what I have to offer, even when it doesn't seem to be enough. May my faith guide me to see our community's needs instead of focusing on my own wants. Amen.*

# In God's Created Order – Blessed

February 4, 2021

This weekend, Lead Pastor Ben Snyder wrapped up the *Blessed* series with one of my favorite Biblical teachings—the miracle of the five loaves and two fish. As a child, I thought it was unbelievable that a boy with a meager amount of food could be used to feed a large crowd. I was also focused on the fact that among the multitude of people present, only one boy brought food to eat. How is that even possible?

## **Luke 9:14-15**

*<sup>14</sup> For there were about 5,000 men there. Jesus replied, "Tell them to sit down in groups of about fifty each."<sup>15</sup> So the people all sat down.*

Can you just imagine being one of the 12 apostles when Jesus told them to sit the crowd of 5,000 down in groups of 50? Why would that be necessary since they only had a small sack lunch to feed everyone? And why in groups of 50? Was Jesus following the CDC guidelines for social distancing (Ha ha)?

Jesus brought order to the crowd because he is a God of order. If we want to live with an open hand, we need to be open to God's created order for our lives. He wants to put order to our chaos so that we can experience a blessed life, one that we experience in the heart. When we put God first, everything else will begin to fall into its proper place.

## **Luke 16:10**

*"If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities."*

This is the principle of *little* and *much*. Only after Jesus looked toward heaven and offered a blessing for the loaves of bread and fish were they multiplied. If we want to live with an open hand, we need to be open to seeking his blessing first.

What would have happened if the apostles had kept the sack lunch instead of giving it to Jesus? They would have missed out on the miracle.

The same principle is true for us. If we hold onto the little that we have, God cannot give us the miracle of multiplication. You do not always see the miracle

until you give away what you have. God blesses an open hand more than a closed fist, so give first and the rest will be blessed.

**Questions:**

Are you open to God's created order? If not, why? Do you feel that God's order is restricting?

Are you putting God first? If not, why? If so, can you see that everything else is falling into order?

Are you being faithful or dishonest with *little*? Your answer will determine if you are given *much*.

**Next Steps:**

Through Biblical principles, Financial Peace University has dramatically changed people's lives as the video this weekend demonstrated. Check out our Groups Directory at <http://cedarcreek.tv/group> to get connected with a life-changing Group.

**Prayer:**

*Dear heavenly Father, give us the courage to live with an open hand instead of a closed fist. Grant us the wisdom to see your created order in the chaos of our lives. Keep us ever faithful to the plans you have for us so that we may experience your blessings. Thank you for giving us the Holy Spirit that dwells within us so that we may have insight into life's challenges that would otherwise remain a mystery. In your Son's name we pray, amen.*

# I Can Hardly Wait to See What God Does Today. – Blessed

February 5, 2021

Have you ever heard the saying, “I can hardly wait to see what God does today?” I really want to live my life with this mindset. I think I would be full of joy and hope. I would be looking for his blessings all throughout my day. I would be focused on trusting in Jesus, instead of being focused on my difficulties. I would live open handedly.

Lead Pastor Ben Snyder said, “Being open handed means being open to seek his blessings first through prayer and being open to see God meet your needs abundantly.” I love the word “abundant.” To me, it means overflowing with blessing.

**John 10:10 ESV** (one of my favorite verses)

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*

Jesus didn't just come to save us; he came so we could have joyful, satisfying, and blessed lives here on earth. God wants all of us to live this type of life. Who doesn't long to live an abundant life?

Unfortunately, many don't live that way and miss God's blessing when they are closed fist. Ben said when you close your hand, you stop trusting God and start trying to figure it out on your own. Sometimes I close my fist when I am not getting my way, I don't think God is moving quickly enough, or his plan doesn't seem to make any sense. (I can't believe I just admitted that.)

Recently, I felt God calling me to do something, but I was concerned I wouldn't be able to afford it. Ultimately, I decided I would obey, but I had a back-up plan just in case. God helped me realize that having a back-up plan wasn't really trusting him. He wanted me to obey him and let him provide. I felt overjoyed! I know I can trust him ... I just needed to obey, sit back, and let him work.

We need to trust God to meet our needs, and meet them abundantly. God wants to bless us—with him, we have more than enough. So how are you going to live: open-handedly or closed-handedly?

### **Jeremiah 17:7-8**

*<sup>7</sup> “But blessed are those who trust in the Lord and have made the Lord their hope and confidence. <sup>8</sup> They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green and they never stop producing fruit.”*

### **Questions:**

Are you open or closed fisted? Explain. How do you respond to trials? How can you improve your trust in God? Why do you think Jesus desires for all of us to have a deep and satisfying life? Why do you think we should pray first?

Are you open to receiving God's blessing even when it doesn't make sense, isn't what you want, or the timing is not what you desire?

### **Next Steps:**

Pray first. Have an action plan ready for the next time you are facing a trial. Write the plan down and be prepared.

Meditate on Jeremiah 17:7-8.

### **Prayer:**

*Jesus, I can hardly wait to see what you do today! I trust you! Help me to live an open-handed life. Help my faith in you to overflow. Help me to live a life that draws other people to you. Thank you for loving me so much that you saved me and long for me to live a rich and satisfying life in you! Help me to always bring glory to your name. Amen.*

*This post was written by Marsha Raymond, a regular contributor and editor or the LivingitOut.*