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Give with an Open Hand

“The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.” (Psalm 145:16)

Jacob and Esau were brothers. To say that there was sibling rivalry would be a bit of an understatement. The roots of their rivalry began at their birth. In Genesis we read,

“When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau’s heel; so he was named Jacob. . .” (Genesis 25:24-25).

From then on it seemed like Jacob’s life was a matter of grabbing for one thing after another. Does your life ever feel like that?

Have you ever noticed what babies do when you reach out with your finger? They grab it and hold on tight and don’t let go. That is just the beginning. As the little ones grow up and become toddlers, they take hold of their toys and hold on for dear life—with a death grip should anyone try to take it away. “Mine!” they defiantly declare.

Then a few years later, as they learn to ride a bicycle, what do their hands do in those first frightful minutes? Grab on and hold tight.

Then there is the license to drive a car and there are those hands again, holding onto the steering wheel until the knuckles turn white.

High school and college graduations roll around and there is that hand—clutching onto the diploma.

Then there is the dad walking his daughter down the aisle, and hands are clutched and holding on (even his, as if he could stop time).

Clutched and grabbing hands. We do it with careers, possessions, and even relationships. They are the story of our life. If you fast-forward to the end, however, do you know what you will discover? As the person is lying ill and dying, in those final moments there are the hands grabbing hold and then . . . the person dies and finally they relax their grip.

You and I are a lot like Jacob. Grabbing from the time of birth. It is a part of our sinful nature. We do it with each other, and we do it with God. How often have you found yourself struggling to say, “Not mine but your will be done, O God”? It is hard to open the hands, even when they are praying.

God’s hands are not closed. He is not a grabber. He is a giver. That is His track record. That is who He is by nature. It has been that way from the beginning. He created the world and then opened His hand to give it to Adam and Eve so they could rule over it and manage it. Even in their sinful disobedience, He yet opened His hand again, giving them clothing in their nakedness.

Throughout the pages of Scripture He continually opens His hand, providing His people with protection and food, and above all, His loving blessing, even when they were clutching onto their false gods. All of this led the Psalmist to declare, *“You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing” (Psalm 145:16)*. The hand of God is open and as Dr. Martin Luther reminds us, it is open not just once in a while but on a daily basis. In

Luther's Small Catechism, regarding the First Article of the Creed, he wrote:

"I believe that God has created me together with all that exists. God has given me and still preserves my body and soul: eyes, ears, and all limbs and senses; reason and all mental faculties. In addition, God daily and abundantly provides shoes and clothing, food and drink, house and farm, spouse and children, fields, livestock, and all property—along with all the necessities and nourishment for this body and life. God protects me against all danger and shields and preserves me from all evil. And all this is done out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all! For all of this I owe it to God to thank and praise, serve and obey him. This is most certainly true" (Luther's Small Catechism, pp. 13-14).

As we turn the pages of Scripture, we see the open hands of Jesus. He could have healed people without touching them, but how many times do we hear of Him reaching out to touch the lame, the leper, the blind and the dead? His approach with children is no different:

"And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them" (Mark 10:16).

Then one day, they took Jesus to a hill. Fists were clenched in anger and hate, but not His. The soldiers grabbed hold of the hammers while Jesus opened His hands as well as His heart as He asked for forgiveness for them.

Days later, when the disciples were huddled together out of fear, Jesus appeared to them. Thomas was with them this time. Jesus opened His hands and said to Thomas,

"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe" (John 20:27).

A few weeks later as He prepares to leave them, *"When he led them out to the vicinity*

of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them" (Luke 24:50). Time after time, God opens His hands to bless and give to His people.

This same Jesus is the One who calls us to follow Him with open hands. Time after time, this was the nature of His call to be His disciples. While John and James were mending their nets, Jesus called them to follow, and they had to open their hands to drop their nets and follow.

A rich young man wanted to know what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him he had to let go of his wealth. The man walked away, unable to open his hands to let go of what he spent his life collecting.

It was a different story with another rich man. His name was Zacchaeus. In his life, Zacchaeus not only held tightly to what he had, but he also grabbed at what other people owned. He was not the town favorite. For whatever reason, Jesus wanted to stay at his house. Something happened in that visit. The generosity of Jesus must have taken hold of the heart of Zacchaeus, because suddenly he was a different person. When his heart opened, so did his hands.

"But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 'Look Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor; and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount'" (Luke 19:8).

This kind of transformation is not contained to individuals. It happens within the community of believers as well. It becomes contagious.

"All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need" (Acts 2:44-45).

The early Christian Church was marked by open hands. They had witnessed the open hands of the Savior giving them His body and blood in the upper room. They had witnessed the open hands of the Savior, giving His life in place of theirs. They had witnessed the open

hands of the Savior as proof that He was alive. How could they then be grabbers? How could we?

“You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing” (Psalm 145:16).

Right there in that verse is what makes the difference between a giver and a grabber. When we trust that the open hand of God will

satisfy the desires of every living thing, then why would we need to keep our hand closed?

Prayer: You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. I trust you. I know how you have opened your hand for me. Help me now to open my hand unto others.
Amen.

Challenge: Are you a grabber or a giver? Richard Foster in his book, “Celebration of Discipline,” (1988) lays out some principles to help us do an inventory on this kind of question. In the challenge below, spend a few moments to reflect on the questions. Rate yourself on a scale of 1-10. (1 equals “I rarely do this” and 10 equals “I always do this.”)

- _____ I reject anything that is producing an addiction in me.
- _____ I buy things for their usefulness rather than their status.
- _____ I refuse to become a slave of modern gadgetry. I resist the notion that because the newest model has a new feature, I must have it.
- _____ I develop a habit of giving things away, especially when I receive something new.
- _____ I reject all “buy now, pay later” plans.
- _____ I learn to enjoy things without owning them; share things; use the library.
- _____ I develop a deeper appreciation for creation; stimulate my senses with nature rather than just modern technology.
- _____ I shun whatever would distract me from my main goal of seeking His kingdom first.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 65

From the Book of Concord: “Moreover, we also confess that God the Father has given us not only all that we have and what we see before our eyes, but also that he daily guards and defends us against every evil and misfortune, warding off all sorts of danger and disaster. All this he does out of pure love and goodness, without our merit, as a kind father who cares for us so that no evil may befall us. But further discussion of this subject belongs in the other two parts of this article, where it says, ‘Father almighty.’

“Hence, because everything we possess, and everything in heaven and on earth besides, is daily given, sustained, and protected by God, it inevitably follows that we are in duty bound to love, praise, and thank him without ceasing, and, in short, to devote all these things to his service, as he has required and enjoined in the Ten Commandments.

“Here much could be said if we were to describe how few people believe this article. We all pass over it; we hear it and recite it, but we neither see nor think about what the words command us to do. For if we believed it with our whole heart, we would also act accordingly, and not swagger about and boast and brag as if we had life, riches, power, honor, and such things of ourselves, as if we ourselves were to be feared and served. This is the way the wretched, perverse world acts, drowned in its blindness, misusing all the blessings and gifts of God solely for its own pride, greed, pleasure, and enjoyment, and never once turning to God to thank him or acknowledge him as Lord or Creator” (Large Catechism, The First Article of the Creed, p. 433. 17-21).