

**Series** Real Life...Real Faith  
**Title:** Offer Open Hands  
**Text:** Deut. 15:7, 8; I Timothy 6:17-19; Mark 10:23; Psalm 126:5, 6  
**Key Word:** Questions:  
**Proposition:** Everyone can open their hands by responding to these questions.

In her book *Radical Gratitude*, Ellen Vaughn tells the story of a family friend named Jerry: Some years ago Jerry was in Russia on a short visit with Prison Fellowship International. He and a group of friends visited a number of prisons, and finished their work a few days early. They asked their hosts if they could go visit children in the hospital.

They were taken to a 750-bed hospital in Moscow. Most of the beds were empty. They learned that this was the place where children with cancer and blood diseases came to die. There was a cafeteria but no food. No trained nurses, no laundry, no disinfectants, few medicines, no lab work. The children's families brought in and prepared food for them in the empty hospital kitchen. This was the national clinic for children, where patients came from all over the Russian Federation.

A staff person brought a young girl in an old wheelchair to Jerry. She was about 14-years-old, with thin brown hair and dark circles under her eyes. "She has about 4 months to live," the woman told Jerry. "We have no medicines to help her."

"What is her name?" Jerry asked. He bent down to the girl's level.

"Eugenia," the woman said.

Jerry couldn't believe it. His daughter had the same name. What if his Eugenia was dying and needed medicine? What would he do? What would this Russian Eugenia's dad do for his daughter if he could?

The staff people told Jerry that the drug protocol for Eugenia would run about \$18,000 (U.S.). Jerry is not a man of wealth, but he turned to his friend, a cattle rancher. "Ed," said Jerry, "if we can't find someone to donate the money to help this little girl, I'll sell my car, and what if you sell your truck, okay?"

"You drive me crazy always trying to swing these deals," Ed said. "But that's why I come on these trips. Okay. I'll do it."

But selling a car and a truck would only care for this child. What about the others who also needed help? Jerry and Ed returned to the U. S. and Jerry got on the phone. Within two weeks, a prominent children's clinic had given him tens of thousands of dollar's worth of drugs packed in cooler boxes with dry ice, and Jerry was on a plane back to Moscow.

Jerry and his friends raised millions of dollars, and the clinic became world-class. Furthermore, they teach nurses and doctors who travel all over the Russian Federation.

Eugenia's cancer went into remission. Jerry and the others got back to Moscow with the first planeload of medicine. During the night, they walked into the hospital. Eugenia's mother saw them coming. She ran down the dim corridor, her face doubtful, and burst into tears. 'You are Jesus, are you not?' she exclaimed in broken English." Church, we are like Jesus when we open our hands and offer what we have. I would

like to challenge us to be the church that offers the open hand. So how do we become this kind of church? I believe we can become this kind of church by responding to four questions.

**First, what is in your hand?** When Moses is standing before the Lord God at the burning bush the LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" A staff," he replied. Exodus 4:2 Friends, what is in your hand? What is in my hand? After Moses explained to the Lord that it was his staff, God commanded him to open his hand and release it. After Moses let it go, the Lord demonstrated his power. Afterward, the Lord returned it to Moses with power and purpose. Again, what is in your hand? Are you releasing every thing you possess into the hand of God? Are you ready to receive a fresh touch of his power and purpose? We can only receive this gift by first letting go!

One day a trapper was working in the African Congo. He devised a clever monkey trap using a hollow gourd into which peanuts were poured through a small hole. The monkey would reach in and grab the peanuts, but the hole was too small to remove his closed hand. Unwilling to release his treasure, the monkey would be caught.

What are we grasping tightly...trying to keep under our control...unwilling to give to the Lord? Would it be a relationship? A possession? A plan? A goal? A dream? Weekly meals out? A talent or ability? What about an unforgiving attitude toward someone who hurt you? God will not bless us until we let it go and offer the open hand.

Open hands not only release us from but also release us to. Open hands release us to generosity. The Lord says, *“If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs.”* (Deut. 15: 7, 8)

A few years ago on a hot June day, Melinda, Ilea, and Kelsey, and I went to Great America Ball Park to watch the Cincinnati Reds. We enjoyed the game, even though they lost. We bought some food and beverages. It was a great time.

When we were walking out of the stadium, Melinda and I were very diligent about keeping track of the girls. We didn't want them to get separated from us in the midst of crowd. I was also nervous about pick pockets in such a tight crowd. Wanting to protect my treasures, I moved my wallet from my rear pocket to the front.

While we were walking we heard in the distance the beating of drums. Approaching a road crossing we noticed that the rhythm of the drums grew louder. When we turned to walk up a flight of stairs we saw a boy about Kelsey age sitting down playing what looked like an African drum. He looked dirty and his hair was unkept. Kelsey couldn't keep her eyes off this boy. When she was in front of the boy, she stopped while the current of people pressed forward. She begged us to give him something. The current of humanity attempted to dislodge this momentary obstacle. I didn't want to stop and dig out my wallet. So, we successfully urged Kelsey to keep moving. As I looked over at her while we walked on to our car, I noticed sadness in her

eyes. She couldn't understand why we kept our hands closed to the needs of this boy. Why would we withhold our love? Why would we reject him?

I suspect that we can think of many reasons why we choose not to open our hands. We don't want to enable laziness or addictive behaviors. We don't want to be different than the crowd who typically passes on by like a river current. We're afraid of being taken advantage of or lured into violent ambush? Later, Melinda and I talked about our response that day, and the kind of example we imprinted upon our daughters. We committed ourselves to opening our hands the next time we were confronted with such an opportunity.

**Second, what is in your storage?** I don't know about you, but I have noticed that our culture is a culture that resembles the squirrel. We find a safe, dry place to store stuff, a basement, an attic, or one of those storage buildings that we can rent. We also build bigger houses, larger rooms, to contain the stuff we have accumulated over the years. We don't mean for this to happen, it just does. It's like the more stuff we gather; the more our space expands, like adding water to a balloon.

We also live in a culture that says that to be popular, to possess power, to be perceived as smart or a hard worker, we have to have large storage areas. The Kingdom of God though says that it's the ones with empty storage areas that are blessed. One day Jesus was watching worshippers bring their offerings to the temple. He didn't bless ones with full storage areas, after giving. He blessed a poor widow who empty her pockets and gave her last two pennies. Paul instructed Timothy to tell other Christ-

followers “...to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.” <sup>1</sup>Tim. 6: 18, 19 I think I will be talking to God about my storage areas. I will be asking him to deliver me from squirrel disease so that I can live with the open hand.

**Third, what is standing in the way?** One day Jesus was approached by a man who fell on his knees before him. The man asked “*Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” “*Why do you call me good?*” Jesus answered. “*No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'*”

“*Teacher,*” he declared, “*all these I have kept since I was a boy.*” Jesus looked at him and loved him. Then he said, “*There is one more thing. Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor. All your wealth will be heavenly wealth. Then come, follow me.*”

*At this the man's face fell. He went away sad. He never expected this. He was holding on tight to a lot of things, and not about to open up his hands. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for those who have it all to enter the kingdom of God!"*

*The disciples couldn't believe what he said. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."*

*The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"*

*Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."*

*Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!"*

*"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first."* Mark 10: 17-31

Jesus was serious then. He is serious today. His word does not change. Each time I revisit this story, I have no other response but silence. There is nothing I can say nor should I say. I am left with only a question. What is standing in the way of my obedience to the call of Christ?

**Finally, where are you headed?** In his book, Signs of Life, David Jeremiah tells the story of Virginia Tebby a ninety-five year old grandmother who still goes out with a church visitation team to witness for the Lord. When her church pioneered a new outreach program, she attended every training session and started making visits with her team every week. "I just love it all," she said, especially when "you visit and revisit someone, and then they come to church. I'm just glad I'm still able to do all of this."

Virginia teaches me a secret to longevity. A blessed long life is greatly dependent upon ones willingness to maintain ones passion, interest, and love for those who need the Lord. I believe that is what the Psalmist meant when he wrote, *“Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.”* Psalm 126: 5, 6

Friends, if your anxious about growing older, if your growing wearing of well doing, if your wondering if your service to Christ and His church is significant, let me encourage you. The Lord gives us the strength, passion, and purpose to bring people closer to Christ. Your prayers for strength, patience, and persistence, in this period of your “Golden Years” are making a difference. Claim this promise from the Lord, *“The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul drought. And strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.”* So ask the Lord God to use you—whatever your years of tears or fears. He will not forsake you. Remember where you are headed, that heavenly place where the Lord will greet all His servants with, “Well done, my good and faithful, servant.” How we respond to these questions: What is in your hand? What is in your storage? What is standing in the way? Where are you headed? Reveals if our hands are open or closed. Our responses disclose if we’re living real life with real faith.