

The Principle of the Open Hand

By PAUL J. SCHARF

There is a dynamic that each of us must learn by experience that has the power to transform our understanding of the Christian life. I call it *the principle of the open hand*.

I have tried to determine who first enunciated this concept. Apparently, it traces to Martin Luther, who stated: "I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess."

Apparently, Corrie Ten Boom—one of the great Christian heroes who arose through the horrors of the Holocaust—loved that quote and added her own twist, saying: "I have learned to hold all things loosely, so God will not have to pry them out of my hands."

A variation on this theme is that God will only dispense His blessings into an open hand, never a clenched fist.

It seems to me that all of these precepts are true and work together, but I would actually add one more layer to them. You see, anytime I close my fist to clutch God's blessings, He does not even have to pry them away from me. They simply crumble and vanish like the dust.

However, when I hold those treasures that He lends for my oversight carefully, but lightly—with my hands open toward heaven, displaying faith—they somehow remain secure. Not only that, He seems to reward my posture. Sometimes He will even:

... open for (me) the windows of heaven
And pour out for (me) *such* blessing
That *there will not be room* enough to receive it. (Mal. 3:10)

When the blessings begin to flow, sometimes the current is so powerful that they spill off of my hands and onto others around me. If I attempt to seize them, however, they simply evaporate. Or they become as rotten as the manna that any of the Israelites attempted to hold for an extra day (Ex. 16:19-20).

I first saw this principle illustrated in ways that I could finally comprehend and appreciate when I became the interim pastor of a mid-sized church that had split nearly in half, in the fall of 2015.

Over the next two years, I would learn to be stretched in ways that I had not previously anticipated. Yet I also experienced God's bounty—in terms of both spiritual and tangible blessings—to a degree that I sometimes struggled to fathom. What important insights I gained there regarding *the principle of the open hand* and, oh, how I needed them in preparation for my service with The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry!

The Lord has led me through many experiences that have instructed me in this principle. Anytime I attempt to control a situation or an issue by my own will, for my own

purposes, I end up having to relearn the lesson. At best, the whole scenario will slip through my fingers, like sand. At worst, my striving will lead to unforeseen—and needless—difficulties, for me and for others.

But then there are those wondrous occasions when I simply give the whole concern to the Lord, as if with open hands. More often than not, the blessings will fall. It seems that God would truly desire to bless me—if only I could retain the ability to commit all things to His sovereign will.

When we attempt to keep a firm grip on “all His benefits” (Ps. 103:2) we are sure to lose them. We might even wreck them. He certainly cannot and will not bless us with anything more.

But when we approach Him with open hands, we have the freedom to discern the workings of His providence. Many times, I have watched Him move one item out of my hands, only to make a space for something far greater. Even if I had been successful in controlling that thing that I prized, it would only have been to my loss.

What are the things that we attempt to grasp? Obviously, they include money and possessions. But then there are also other, bigger things like opportunities, positions, status, honor and credit. Of those who clasp these things, Jesus said, “Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward” (Matt. 6:2).

I am thankful that the Lord God deals with each of us with an “open ... hand,” allowing all creation to be “filled with good” (Ps. 104:28).

As King David wrote in Ps. 145:15-16,

The eyes of all look expectantly to You,
And You give them their food in due season.
You open Your hand
And satisfy the desire of every living thing.

May we, likewise, receive the plenteousness that He offers in a manner befitting such a good and gracious Giver.

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