Open Hands

Deuteronomy: Choose Life | Week Sixteen | Deuteronomy 14:22–15:23

THE BIG IDEA

God commands his people to feast before him, release what others owe, and never send anyone away empty-handed. Generosity is not how we earn God's favor. It is what happens when we remember how freely he has given to us. We can live with open hands because God has opened his hand to us.

01 Check in

Before you open the passage, take a few quiet minutes and answer these for yourself.

1. What was a high point and a low point from your week?

2. Where have you seen God at work recently, and where has it been hard to see him?

3. Last time you sat down with this, you named one step to take. How did it go, and what got in the way?

02 Setting the scene

We are still in the Worship movement of Deuteronomy, where Moses shows Israel that loving God shapes every part of their life together. Last week, chapter 14 carried worship into how Israel grieved and what they ate. Now Moses turns to harvests, dinners, loans, debts, workers, and livestock. Israel is standing on the edge of the promised land after forty years of manna, a daily bread they could never hoard. Across the Jordan are fields, vineyards, and storehouses, and for the first time they will have more than they need for today. The wilderness asked whether they would trust God with nothing. The land will ask whether they still trust him with something to lose. Three times in chapter 15, God gives the same instruction: open your hand.

03 Read the Word

Read the passage slowly. If you can, read it aloud to yourself, and read it twice.

DEUTERONOMY 14:22-15:23 **CSB**

Open your Bible and read Deuteronomy 14:22 through 15:23. Take it in four sections: 14:22–29, 15:1–11, 15:12–18, and 15:19–23.

First impressions

4. What word, phrase, or image stood out to you as you read?

5. What did you notice, or what surprised you, about the way God brings feasts, debts, and freedom into worship?

04 Study the Scripture

This week's sermon walked through three things an open hand does. First, it rejoices in God's gifts and widens the table. Second, it releases what others owe. Third, it remembers who set it free. Work through each one in order, and reread the verses as you go.

REJOICE

Read Deuteronomy 14:22 to 29 again.

The tithe was a tenth of each year's harvest, and the surprising part is what God told Israel to do with it: bring it to his house and eat it. If the trip was too far, they could exchange it for silver and buy whatever they wanted for a feast before the Lord. Verse 23 gives the purpose: so that they would always learn to fear the Lord. The feast was a classroom. Year after year it taught them that the rain, the grain, and the table all came from God. A harvest can teach you "look what I built" or "look what God gave," and worship teaches the right lesson.

Then God widened the table. The Levite had no land, the resident alien had no roots, and the fatherless and the widow had no one to provide for them. Every third year the tithe was stored in their own towns so these neighbors could come, eat, and be satisfied. Not a token, but a full plate. Many of us come from cultures where no guest leaves hungry, and yet our tables still tend to fill with people just like us. Jesus told us to invite the ones who cannot pay us back (Luke 14:12-14).

6. God commanded a feast before he ever asked Israel to give anything away. How does that change the way you picture God when you think about giving?

7. Look at the guest list in verse 29. Who is usually at your table, and who might be missing?

RELEASE

Read Deuteronomy 15:1 to 11 again.

Every seventh year, creditors were to cancel what their neighbors owed, because "the Lord's release" had been proclaimed. Their claims on other people answered to God. Verse 4 holds out the dream of a people with no poor among them, and verse 11 admits that need will keep coming. God does not let the dream make us naive or the reality make us cynical. Because need keeps coming, we keep our hands open.

Moses then goes beneath the hand to the heart. Verse 9 describes a lender who glances at the calendar, sees the release year coming, and quietly decides not to help. The brother's need has not changed, only the expected return, and God calls that calculation wicked. Budgets are not the problem. The problem is when calculation becomes a way to avoid love. Our church has seen the other side of this. In December 2020, LOFT helped relieve about $1.2 million of medical debt for families across Dallas-Fort Worth, families we had never met who opened an envelope expecting a bill and found their debt erased.

8. Verse 7 names the heart before the hand. Where have you noticed your heart closing toward someone before your hand ever did?

9. Verse 9 describes a careful calculation that becomes a way to avoid love. Where might your own planning be giving you permission not to help?

REMEMBER

Read Deuteronomy 15:12 to 23 again.

This law regulated debt servitude, where someone who had fallen on hard times worked off what they owed. It is not something to romanticize, but God put firm limits on the one who held the power. After six years the servant went free, and verse 13 adds a surprise: do not send him away empty-handed. Load him up from the flock, the threshing floor, and the winepress. Freedom without provision is not really freedom. Verse 15 gives the reason: remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord redeemed you. At the burning bush God promised that Israel would not leave Egypt empty-handed (Exodus 3:21), and they did not. They released others because they remembered how they had been released. The chapter closes with the firstborn, a reminder of Passover and that the first and the best belong to God.

LOFT is living in a release year of our own. About $1.3 million of debt on our building is set to be forgiven. Like the servant in verse 13, we have been released and not sent away empty-handed. Beginning in 2027, that blessing will flow outward in widening circles: scholarships for Richardson High School students, new and revitalized churches across Dallas County, seminary scholarships for the next generation of pastors, training for pastors and leaders in Costa Rica, and support for missionaries around the world. We have been released to bless.

10. God commanded more than an unlocked door. He commanded resources for the road. Who in your life needs more than permission to start over, and what could you put in their hands?

11. Our leadership team keeps asking, “God, you have blessed us; who are you calling us to bless?” How would you answer that question for your own life this week?

05 Back to Jesus

How does this passage point us back to Jesus?

In Luke 4, Jesus stood up in the synagogue in Nazareth and read from Isaiah that he had come to proclaim release to the captives and the year of the Lord's favor. Then he said, “Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled.” Jesus is the seventh year. He is the Lord's release. Though he was rich, for our sake he became poor (2 Corinthians 8:9), and on the cross God erased the certificate of debt that stood against us (Colossians 2:14). The Son of God did not clutch what was his. His hands were stretched open and nailed there for closed-fisted people. We do not open our hands to earn his grace. We open them because he opened his first, and at his table we come with empty hands to receive.

12. You expected a demand, and the letter says paid. How does knowing your debt has been released free you to open your hands this week?

APPLICATION

What is God telling me to do today? Write down one specific step you will take this week.

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06 Pray

Bring the step you wrote down to God, along with anything else on your heart, and ask him for help.

What I am bringing to God

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A PRAYER TO CARRY WITH YOU

Father, every good thing in my life came from your open hand. Forgive me for the times I have held your gifts as if they were mine to keep. Open my table to people who cannot repay me. Open my heart before my calculations close it. Help me remember that in Jesus my debt was released and I was not sent away empty-handed, so that I can live with open hands. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Through the week

Here are three ways to keep this week's passage with you.

- Read Deuteronomy 14:22–15:23 again and ask God what he is saying to you.
- Take the one step you named and tell someone about it.
- Reach out to the person God brought to mind, and come back to this page next week to see how it went.

07 Notes and reflections