

open hands.

It was never yours. That's the good news.

Time, money, generosity, and rest as discipleship.

Open Hands: Whole-Life Stewardship. Time, Money, Generosity, and Rest.
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Sunday Worship: Crossland High School, 6901 Temple Hill Rd, Temple Hills, MD 20748.
Sundays at 10:00 AM
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This book is discipleship, not a fundraising campaign. Nothing in these pages is a request for your money. It's an invitation to a freer grip on everything in your hands.

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You're Invited

“The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.”

P S A L M 2 4 : 1 (N I V)

From the Community of Hope family

This book comes to you from Community of Hope AME Church, the family God planted in the DMV in 2006, in a nightclub, with eight people who believed God meant every word. Eight people, and everything they carried in their hands. Twenty years in the making. Still going. Still giving. Still convinced that everyone has a chance.

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.”

1 P E T E R 4 : 1 0 (N I V)

Whoever picked up this book, whether you tithe like clockwork or you flinch every time a preacher mentions money, the welcome is the same. We don’t care how you come to Community of Hope. We only care about the way you leave: unclenched, unhurried, generous, and rested. This book exists to pry nothing out of your hands and to put ease into them.

Where Everyone Has a Chance.

A letter to the reader

You good? And be honest: did you tense up a little when you saw a church book about money and time?

I understand why. Somewhere along the way, too many of us watched stewardship get reduced to a pledge card. We've seen the plate get weaponized, the promises get inflated, and preachers get rich telling poor people that God was waiting on one more sacrificial seed. If that's the bruise you're carrying, hear me before anything else: this book is not a capital campaign. There's no ask on the last page. Nobody is coming for your wallet.

Here's what this book actually is. It's a conversation about the whole life in your hands: the hours, the dollars, the gifts, the energy, even the sleep, and the discovery that changes everything: none of it was ever yours. It was handed to you, on purpose, by an Owner who trusts you with it. That's not a threat. That's a promotion. Managers don't have to grip. Managers get to work with an Owner whose pockets have no bottom.

So we're going to talk about time before we ever talk about money, because your calendar tells the truth about your worship before your bank statement does. We're going to talk about money like Jesus did, plainly, and more often than polite church folk prefer. We're going to talk about generosity that's bigger than a check. And then, hear this, we're going to talk about rest, because a stewardship book that never mentions sleep is how you burn out the very people God loves.

Around here we've said it for years: this season isn't about counting members. It's about making our members count. That's stewardship. Not what we collect from you. What God releases through you.

The chapters are short on purpose. Read one, then look at your hands.

It's never too late to loosen your grip.

With open hands,

Pastor Tony Lee

SENIOR PASTOR, COMMUNITY OF HOPE AME CHURCH

it all belongs to God

The Owner and the Manager

Every idea in this book stands on one verse, so let's put it down first like a foundation stone:

"The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it."

P S A L M 2 4 : 1 (N I V)

Everything in it. The house with your name on the mailbox. The paycheck with your name in the memo line. The hours in your day, the skills in your hands, the people at your table, the body you woke up in. If the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, then nothing you're holding is actually yours. You're not the owner of your life's inventory. You're the manager.

Now, before that lands wrong, understand what kind of word *steward* is. In Scripture, the steward ran the whole house: Joseph in Potiphar's estate, trusted with everything but the man's wife. A steward isn't a beggar or a bystander. A steward is somebody the owner looked at and said: I trust you with what's mine. Stewardship isn't a fundraising word that churches dressed up. It's a trust word. It's God handing you keys.

And here's why this is good news and not a shakedown. If you own it all, then it's all on you: the protecting, the multiplying, the worrying. Ownership is heavy. But if God owns it and you manage it, the weight shifts. Managers consult the Owner. Managers ask for more resources when the assignment outgrows the supply. Managers sleep at night, because the estate's future doesn't ride on their shoulders. The tightest grip in the world can't hold what was never yours, and the freest hands in the world belong to people who know who owns the house.

One more thing while the foundation is wet. Notice what Psalm 24 includes: *all who live in it*. You don't just manage things. You are managed goods yourself, God's own, twice over: made and then bought back. Whole-life

stewardship starts there. Not what will I do with my stuff, but what will God do with all of me?

That's the question this book keeps asking. Hands open. Let's go.

TRY IT: THE INVENTORY

Take five minutes and write your manager's inventory: your weekly hours, your income, your skills, your relationships, your health, your stuff. Then write one word across the top of the page: *God's*. Read the list again with that word over it and notice what shifts in your chest. Keep the page; chapter seventeen is coming back for it.

The Talents

Jesus told a story about three managers, and if this book had to pick one parable to live in, it's this one. A master, leaving on a journey, entrusts his wealth to three servants: five bags of gold to one, two to another, one to the third, each according to ability. Two of them put the money to work and double it. The third digs a hole.

Look at what the master says to the faithful ones, because it's the sentence this whole book wants over your life:

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"

M A T T H E W 2 5 : 2 1 (N I V)

Faithful, not successful. Notice the two-bag servant gets the identical commendation as the five-bag servant, word for word. God doesn't grade on volume. God grades on faithfulness with what was actually handed to you, which means the single mother stretching one income and the executive managing seven figures can hear the exact same "well done." Comparison is a thief with no place in stewardship.

Now the third servant. Listen to his explanation, because it diagnoses more of us than we'd like: "I knew that you are a hard man... So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground" (Matthew 25:24-25). Catch that. His problem wasn't laziness first. It was theology. He believed a lie about the master's character, that the owner was harsh, stingy, waiting to punish, and the lie produced fear, and the fear produced a hole in the ground. Show me somebody sitting on buried gifts, buried money, buried time, and I'll usually show you somebody who quietly believes God is hard.

But the Master of this house isn't hard. The Master throws a party for faithful managers: *come and share your master's happiness*. The whole point of multiplying what's in your hands is joy, shared joy, owner-and-manager joy.

Something of yours is buried right now. A gift you shelved because somebody laughed at it. Money sitting scared instead of working. A calling you keep postponing until life calms down. Buried isn't safe, friend. Buried is just buried.

T R Y I T : N A M E T H E B U R I E D T H I N G

Ask God one honest question tonight: *what have I buried, and what lie about You made me bury it?* Write down what surfaces. Then pray:

"God, You aren't hard. You're the Owner who throws parties for faithful managers. Help me dig up what fear buried. Amen."

Open Hands, Closed Fists

Try something physical for a second. Make two fists, tight, and hold them for ten seconds. Feel that? The tension runs up your forearms into your shoulders. Now open both hands, palms up, and feel the difference. Your body just preached this chapter.

A closed fist does two things at once: it keeps things from getting out, and it keeps things from getting in. That's the trade nobody mentions. Grip your money and you also block the provision God wanted to hand you next. Grip your schedule and you block the divine interruptions where most of the good stuff happens. Grip your kids, your title, your church role, and you slowly crush what you're clutching. The fist has no security setting. It only has clenched.

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”

J A M E S 1 : 1 7 (N I V)

Every good gift, coming down, continually, from a Giver who doesn't flicker. That verse is the reason open hands aren't reckless. If gifts came down once, long ago, from a moody Giver, then yes, grab and guard. But if the Father of lights is still giving, doesn't change, and doesn't run dry, then an open hand is the most rational posture in the universe. You can release what's in your palm because more is already descending.

Job stood at the worst gravesides a man can stand at and worshiped with the longest view in Scripture: the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord anyway. Don't rush past what made that possible. Job's hands had been open the whole time. What arrives as a gift can leave as a grief without destroying you, because it was never gripped as a possession. The people the fist destroys are the ones who thought they owned it all.

Here's the reframe to carry into every remaining chapter: stewardship is not a program the church runs in November. It's a posture your soul holds all year. Time, money, gifts, rest, all of it comes down to the same two hand positions. Clenched or open. Hoarding or receiving-and-releasing. Fear's grip or trust's palm.

Simple. Not easy. Let's get specific.

T R Y I T : T H E P A L M S - U P P R A Y E R

Tonight, pray with your body the way we practiced in *Just Talk*. Make fists and name out loud what you've been gripping: "God, this is where I've been clenched: _____." Hold the fists while you say it. Then open both palms and finish: "It's Yours. It always was. Keep it, use it, or hand me what's next." Stay palms-up for one full minute.

your time

Numbered Days

We start with time, not money, and that's on purpose. Money is replaceable; you can earn another dollar. Health can often recover. Even reputations rebuild. But nobody, not once in human history, has gotten back a Tuesday. Time is the one asset in your management portfolio with no restock date, which makes it the most valuable thing you steward, and, strangely, the thing we track least.

Moses, the man who spent forty years watching a generation run out of days in the wilderness, prayed the prayer this chapter stands on:

“Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

P S A L M 90 : 12 (N I V)

Teach us, he says, because numbering doesn't come naturally. We round up. We live like the account is bottomless, and then we're stunned every December, every birthday, every funeral. Do the honest math once: if God grants you eighty years, you get about 4,160 weeks. Somewhere around 700 of them are gone by the time you finish school. Numbering your days isn't morbid. It's the beginning of wisdom, because only people who know the account is finite spend from it on purpose.

Paul says it with a manager's verb: “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15–16). Making the most of, buying up, like a shrewd shopper who knows the window is closing. Not hustling harder; noticing. The opportunity in front of you, the child in front of you, the neighbor in front of you: these have expiration dates the calendar doesn't print.

And here's the sentence that stings, so take it gently: your calendar is a confession. Where your hours actually go, not where you intend them to go,

is a truer statement of what you worship than anything you'll sing on Sunday. Most of us don't need more time. We need to look at where it's already going, with the lights on. That's the exercise below, and it's harder than fasting.

The good news of this chapter isn't hurry. It's that the Owner of your days numbered them first (Psalm 139:16), knows exactly how many are in the account, and wastes none of what's entrusted back. Manage the hours with the One who made them. Wisdom lives there.

TRY IT: ONE HONEST DAY

Tomorrow, track one full day in half-hour blocks: work, scrolling, driving, serving, resting, all of it, no editing for church. At night, look at the page and ask two questions: *what does this day say I worship?* and *where would I want thirty of these minutes back?* Bring the answer to God, not to shame, but to schedule.

Martha's Kitchen

Somewhere along the way, church folk decided that exhaustion is next to godliness. We brag about busy the way other people brag about vacations. Ask how somebody's doing and the testimony comes back: girl, I am *running*. And underneath the complaint, if we're honest, there's a little pride, because busy feels like mattering.

Jesus walked into a house like that once. Martha opened her home to Him, and then did what many of us would do with God in the living room: she went to the kitchen and started performing. Luke says she was “distracted by all the preparations.” Her sister Mary sat down at Jesus’ feet instead, and Martha finally boiled over: Lord, don’t you care that I’m doing all this by myself? Tell her to help me! And Jesus answered with a tenderness that still reads fresh two thousand years later:

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

L U K E 1 0 : 4 1 - 4 2 (N I V)

Notice what Jesus did not say. He didn't say the cooking was sin, and He didn't call Martha lazy for serving; someone had to feed the group. He named what the serving had done to her insides: worried and upset about many things. The problem wasn't the work. It was that the work had swallowed the point. She was hosting Jesus and missing Jesus, in her own house.

That's the time-stewardship trap nobody warns you about: it's possible to be busy for God in a way that costs you God. Church can become another kitchen. Serving on three ministries, running every program, saying yes to every request until the One the ministry is about becomes the person you never sit with. Busy is not a fruit of the Spirit. Peace is. And a stuffed

calendar can be a form of buried treasure too, all your hours in the ground of obligation, none of them multiplied into presence.

Mary chose “what is better,” and Jesus said it would not be taken from her. Casseroles get eaten. Programs end. The hour at His feet compounds forever. Managers of finite hours should note where the permanent returns are.

TRY IT: QUIT ONE THING

Look at this week and cancel or decline one thing, one rehearsal, one meeting, one obligation that's really just performance, and give that exact hour to sitting at Jesus' feet: Word open, phone elsewhere. If guilt shows up, and it will, greet it with Luke 10:42: *few things are needed. Or indeed only one.*

Seasons

Here's a stewardship truth that sets a lot of guilty people free: God doesn't ask the same hours from every season of your life.

"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens."

ECCLESIASTES 3:1 (NIV)

The mother of a newborn cannot serve like the retiree, and God isn't confused about that even when the ministry sign-up sheet is. The man working two jobs to keep the lights on isn't less faithful than the brother with a flexible schedule and a bass boat. The college student in finals week, the daughter nursing her father through his last season, the new believer still learning where the books of the Bible are: each one is holding a different assignment, and the Owner hands out assignments by season, not by shame.

This is why comparison wrecks time-stewardship the same way it wrecks money. The two-bag servant wasn't judged against the five-bag servant, remember. Faithfulness is always measured inside your actual season, never inside somebody else's highlight reel. Some seasons the faithful thing is building. Some seasons it's planting quietly. Some seasons, hear this, the faithful thing is surviving, and God receives survival as stewardship when survival is what the season holds. We learned that in *When Life Falls Apart*, and it's still true here.

But seasons cut the other way too, so let's be honest in both directions. Some of us are hiding in a season that ended. Still saying "it's just a busy season" about a pace that's been constant for six years. Still deferring the calling until things calm down, when things have no intention of calming down. A season is a legitimate assignment. An excuse wearing a season's clothes is a hole in the ground.

So do the manager's exercise: name your season out loud. Not the one you wish you were in, not the one your church friends are in. Yours. Then ask the Owner the only question that matters: *what does faithfulness look like inside this season?* Not outside it, not in spite of it. Inside it. The answer will be smaller than your guilt suggests and bigger than your excuses want.

T R Y I T : N A M E T H E S E A S O N

Complete two sentences in writing. First: "The season I am actually in is _____." Second: "Inside this season, faithfulness with my time looks like _____." Then share both sentences with one person who can check on you in ninety days, because seasons change, and managers review the portfolio.

your money

The Talk Nobody Wants

Let's name the elephant and then talk about it anyway: a lot of us walked into this part of the book with our guard up. Money talk from a pulpit has hurt people. You've seen the schemes, the private planes, the seed-faith promises aimed at grandmothers on fixed incomes. Some of you tensed up at church asks so many times the flinch is automatic now. That bruise is real, and we won't pretend it isn't.

But here's the problem with never talking about money at church: Jesus wouldn't recognize that church. He talked about money and possessions constantly, more than He talked about prayer, more than He talked about faith. Eleven of His parables touch treasure, wages, debts, barns, or coins. Not because He was raising a building fund. Because He knew exactly where the fight for the human heart happens:

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

M A T T H E W 6 : 1 9 - 2 1 (N I V)

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be. Not the other way around. Jesus says your money leads and your heart follows it, which means your bank statement isn't just a financial document. It's a map of where your heart has been going. That's why He won't leave the subject alone, and why we can't either.

And then He says the quiet part with no cushion: "No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 6:24). Notice He doesn't say you cannot *have* both God and money. He says you cannot *serve* both. Money makes an excellent employee and a merciless god. It will run errands for you all day, and it will run your life the moment you kneel to

it. The only question is which side of that line your dollars live on, and everybody's dollars live on one side or the other.

So here's the deal for the next three chapters. No pledge cards. No guilt. No promises that God is a slot machine. Just the honest question managers ask: whose money is this, and what does the Owner want it doing? If that question makes you nervous, good. Nervous means we found the grip.

TRY IT: THE FLINCH PRAYER

Tell God the truth about money and church, out loud, unpolished:

*"God, here's what I feel when money comes up at church:
_____. Here's who hurt that trust: _____. Heal
the flinch, and teach me what You actually say about what's in my
hands. Amen."*

First Fruits, Not Leftovers

Long before Israel had kings or buildings or budgets, God taught them an order: bring the first of the harvest, not the last of it.

“Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.”

PROVERBS 3:9-10 (NIV)

First fruits is a trust posture disguised as a farming schedule. Giving God the first portion, before you know how the rest of the harvest turns out, says with your hands what your mouth sings on Sunday: I believe the Owner will keep providing. Giving leftovers says the opposite, however loud the singing gets. The order is the whole lesson. What you fund first is what you actually trust.

Now, the tithe. Ten percent, first, to the storehouse. Some of you were raised on it; some of you have heard it preached like a protection racket. Here's how we hold it at Community of Hope, with our Bibles open. The tithe is training wheels for trust: a concrete, proportional starting line that treats the other ninety like it's God's too. It's not a tax that buys blessing, and it's not a law that damns you in a lean month; you're under grace, and the God of grace sees the single mother's five dollars just fine (chapter twelve will prove it). But don't let the abusers steal the practice. Proportional, first-fruits giving has trained more Christians out of money-fear than any sermon ever preached, because you can't do it without watching God hold up the ninety.

And yes, Malachi is there, the one place in Scripture where God says out loud: run the experiment. “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven” (Malachi 3:10).

Read it carefully before anybody weaponizes it: the point of the storehouse was *food in the house*, provision for Levites, widows, and strangers. The floodgates promise isn't a Bentley. It's the discovery, made by millions of ordinary givers, that the ninety with God goes further than the hundred without, and that a community that pools first fruits never watches its widows starve.

Give first. Give proportionally. Give where it feeds people. That's not fundraising. That's formation.

TRY IT: THE FIRST-FRUITS MONTH

For one month, flip your order: give your proportion first, the day the money lands, before bills, before anything. Pick the percentage in prayer, with no pretending; if ten is where you are, ten; if you're climbing toward it, start where trust is real. Then watch the month with your eyes open. You're not testing your budget. You're testing God's word about God's character, with God's permission.

Enough

There's a word the economy never says, because the whole machine runs on you never hearing it: *enough*. Every ad you'll see today, and you'll see thousands, exists to keep that word out of your vocabulary. New phone, new car, new body, new kitchen. The lifestyle rises to swallow every raise. They even gave it a polite name, lifestyle creep, as if it crept in on its own and nobody opened the door.

Jesus saw the machine coming: "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions" (Luke 12:15). And Paul handed Timothy the secret the machine most fears:

"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that."

1 T I M O T H Y 6 : 6 - 8 (N I V)

Contentment is gain. Not settling, gain, the raise that doesn't come with new withholding. The person who learns "enough" gets an instant increase in wealth without a single new dollar, because wealth was never the pile; it was the distance between what you have and what you crave. Close the gap from the craving side and you're rich by Tuesday.

Paul keeps going, and it's tender, not scolding: those who want to get rich fall into a trap, and "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:9-10). The love of it, not the money itself. Money is a tool; craving is the trap. And some of you know the teeth of that trap personally, because debt has your name in its mouth right now. Hear us carefully: no shame from this pulpit. Half this country is a paycheck from the edge, and some debt walked in through emergencies, not appetites. But whatever door it came through, the way out starts with the same word: enough. Enough is the

budget's best friend, debt's worst enemy, and contentment's plainest prayer.

The writer of Hebrews ties the whole thing to something better than optimism: "be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'" (Hebrews 13:5). Contentment isn't pretending the account is bigger than it is. It's knowing Who stays when the account runs low. That's the floor under "enough," and it doesn't crack.

TRY IT: THE ENOUGH AUDIT

Two moves this week. One: write down five things you already own or have that ten years ago you were praying for. Sit with that list; that's the machine losing. Two: cancel or pause one recurring expense that exists because of creep, not need, and aim that money at debt or generosity. Say the word out loud as you do it: *enough*.

Money and the Block

If you walked with us through *Light in Dark Places*, you already know the block is the assignment. Here's the stewardship chapter of that book, the one we saved: your money is out discipling your neighborhood right now, whether you sent it on purpose or not.

Every dollar is a vote for the world it passes through. Spend it at the neighborhood business and you just voted for that family, that payroll, those jobs staying on your street. Bank it where the neighborhood can borrow and you voted for the block's next homeowner. Give it to the food ministry and you voted for the family down the hall eating this week. Your dollars never sit still and never stay neutral. They are always somewhere, doing something, for somebody. A manager's question isn't just how much do I give. It's what is all of it doing while it's mine to direct?

The earliest church understood this so deeply it startles modern readers: "they sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need" is how Acts describes the first congregation, and the result was that nobody among them lacked. We're not commanding you to sell your house. We're pointing at the instinct: those believers saw their assets as tools of the body, not trophies of the individual. The offering plate was the least of it. Their whole economic life had converted along with their hearts.

"Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."

1 J O H N 3 : 1 8 (N I V)

Actions and truth, in money terms, look unglamorous: groceries doubled for the stretched neighbor. The barber's chair paid forward for the kid coming home from lockup. The Christmas budget that includes a family you're not related to. The habit of asking, before major purchases, one manager's question: *does the Owner have any instructions for this money before I lock*

it up? You'd be surprised how often the answer arrives with a name and address attached.

None of this requires wealth. It requires aim. The widow in chapter twelve is about to prove that the smallest amounts, aimed by love, outweigh fortunes. For now, just accept the promotion: you're not only a giver. You're the routing department for some of God's provision to your block. Route boldly.

TRY IT: FOLLOW THE MONEY

Pull up last month's statement and read it like a map: where did your money actually go, and what did it build there? Then reroute one recurring dollar-stream toward the block: one subscription's worth to the food ministry, one dinner out redirected to a neighbor's need, one purchase moved to a local business. Small aim, long obedience.

give yourself away

The Cheerful Giver

Here is the single most liberating sentence in the Bible about giving, written by Paul while collecting a famine-relief offering, which means he wrote it while he had every incentive to squeeze:

“Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

2 C O R I N T H I A N S 9 : 7 (N I V)

Decided in your heart. Not extracted by a forty-minute offering appeal. Not guilted, not shamed, not squeezed while the organ swells. Paul, mid-fundraiser, tells the givers that God refuses gifts powered by compulsion, because God isn't after your money. God is after the giver. A resentful hundred impresses heaven less than a joyful ten, because only one of them came from a free person.

Cheerful doesn't mean grinning at the ATM. The word underneath is closer to *hilarious*: giving that bubbles up, giving that feels like getting away with something. If you've ever covered a stranger's groceries and floated to your car afterward, you've touched it. That feeling isn't pride malfunctioning. It's design. You were built in the image of a Giver; giving is the family resemblance showing up. The fist starves that joy. The open hand keeps finding it.

And Paul immediately answers the fear that keeps hands closed: “And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8). Read the promise precisely, because the prosperity preachers read it sloppy on purpose. It doesn't say givers get rich. It says givers get *resupplied*: all that you need, so you can abound in every good work. God funds channels, not warehouses. Keep the money moving through you

toward good work and the supply line stays live. Dam it up and you're just a warehouse, and warehouses don't need resupply.

Sowing and reaping is real (2 Corinthians 9:6); farmers who plant more, harvest more. Just remember what the harvest is for. Seed isn't given to the sower so the sower can eat seed. It's given so the sower can plant again, bigger. Generosity compounds, and the interest is paid in more capacity to give.

T R Y I T : D E C I D E O N E G I F T

This week, plan one gift on purpose: decided in your heart, ahead of time, with joy as the test. Pick the person or need, pick the amount or the act, pick the day. No impulse, no pressure, no audience. Then deliver it and pay attention to what happens in your chest. That's the cheerful part waking up.

Two Coins

One afternoon in the temple, Jesus did something that should change how every church in America thinks about giving: He sat down opposite the treasury and watched. Not the totals. The people.

“Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.’”

M A R K 1 2 : 4 3 - 4 4 (N I V)

Many rich people threw in large amounts that day, and heaven's accounting ignored every one of them. Two small copper coins, worth only a few cents, topped the leaderboard, because Jesus doesn't measure gifts by their size. He measures them by what's left after. The rich gave out of surplus; the math never touched their lives. The widow's two coins were everything she had to live on. Heaven weighs sacrifice, not amounts, which means the biggest giver in your congregation might be somebody the finance office has never noticed. God's donor list is upside down from ours.

If you've ever felt embarrassed by the size of your gift, this story is your vindication. The five dollars that had to fight your budget to get free is heavier in God's hands than a comfortable thousand. Give it with your head up.

But there's a sharper edge to this story, and honest churches don't skip it. Look at what Jesus said moments before He watched the widow: beware the teachers of the law who “devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers” (Mark 12:40). Then a widow walks up and gives her last two coins to that very institution. Jesus honors *her*, and has already condemned *them*. Both things are true at once: sacrificial giving is precious to God, and religious systems that bleed the poor while praying long prayers are under judgment. So hear our commitment, in print: this church

exists to fill widows' houses, not devour them. If giving ever gets preached here as a way to strip the vulnerable, hold this page up in the air. And when you give, give like the widow, but give to storehouses that feed people. Jesus watches the plate from both directions.

T R Y I T : T H E S E C R E T G I F T

Sometime this week, give one gift completely in secret: no name, no thank-you possible, no story told afterward, not even to your closest friend. Let the only witnesses be you and the One who sits opposite the treasury. That's the purest mirror your giving will ever get.

Gifts, Hands, and Casseroles

If generosity were only about money, then broke seasons would bench you from it, and that has never once been true. Peter writes to scattered, struggling believers, most of whom had no surplus to speak of, and hands every single one of them a stewardship:

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.”

1 P E T E R 4 : 1 0 (N I V)

Faithful stewards of God’s grace *in its various forms*. Grace comes in forms, plural, and you’re holding at least one. If you read *Breath and Fire* with us, you’ve already inventoried the spiritual gifts the Spirit distributes. This chapter widens the lens to everything else in your hands: the trade, the training, the truck, the spare room, the way you cook, the way you listen, the hours you’re good at that somebody else drowns in.

Think about who actually holds a church together, and a block. The accountant who does taxes free every spring for seniors. The barber who gives first-day-of-school cuts to kids whose mothers are stretched. The auntie whose casserole arrives at the door of every grief in the building before the family has thought about food. The brother with the pickup truck who has moved half the congregation. The retired teacher who reads with second graders on Tuesdays. Not one of those is a line item in anybody’s offering, and every one of them is first-fruits giving of the purest kind. The casserole counts. It has always counted.

This is also the answer for every season when money is tight and generosity feels locked. The widow gave two coins; you may have zero coins and a working set of hands, and hands are inventory. Time, skill, presence, and hospitality convert to love at a rate money frequently can’t match. Ask the

grieving family which mattered more: the flowers fund, or the auntie at the door.

So run the wider inventory. What's in your hands that isn't money? Now the manager's question, same as always: what does the Owner want it doing, and for whom? Somewhere within a mile of your seat, there's a need shaped exactly like something you've been treating as ordinary.

TRY IT: ONE SKILL, ONE MONTH

Name the one skill or asset you use so easily you've stopped counting it: the cooking, the numbers, the truck, the listening. Offer it once this month, deliberately, to your church or your block: tell the ministry leader it's available, or take it straight to the neighbor who needs it. Watch what grace does with its various forms.

Generational Hands

Stewardship has a horizon problem to fix: most of us manage for our own lifetime and call it planning. Scripture keeps a longer clock:

“A good person leaves an inheritance for their children's children.”

PROVERBS 13:22 (NIV)

Children's children. The proverb assumes a manager thinking two generations out, planting trees whose shade lands on grandchildren. And for our community specifically, this chapter is not optional. We have watched family houses lost because a deed sat in a dead grandmother's name for thirty years. We have watched heirs' property split and sold from under families because nobody wrote a will. We have watched savings vanish in probate fights that a single afternoon of paperwork would have prevented. Let's say it plainly, as family: getting a will is a discipleship act. Naming beneficiaries is a discipleship act. The enemy has taken enough Black wealth through our silence about death. An open hand includes the one that signs the documents.

But money is the smallest thing that passes through generational hands, so don't stop at the paperwork. An inheritance is everything the next generation receives from your management: the faith, first, whether they saw it lived close-up or only heard it claimed. The name, and what it's known for on the block. The recipes, the stories, the discipline, the photographs with the names written on the back. The habit of open hands itself, because generosity is caught at kitchen tables decades before it's taught in sermons. A child who watches you double the groceries for the neighbor learns more stewardship in that aisle than in a year of youth group.

So teach them on purpose. Let the kids see the giving, age-appropriately, not for applause but for apprenticeship. Tell them why the first check goes

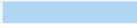
where it goes. Show them the budget when they're old enough; secrecy about money raises anxious adults. And have the conversation nobody wants: what happens to everything when you're gone, said out loud, with the family in the room. It's awkward for an evening. It protects them for a generation.

You inherited somebody's open or closed hands. Your grandchildren will inherit yours. Choose what travels.

T R Y I T : T H E L E G A C Y M O V E

Two assignments, pick your order. One: if you don't have a will, make the appointment this month; if you do, check the beneficiaries. Two: hold one legacy conversation, with your kids, your parents, or both: what we have, where it goes, and why we give the way we give. Awkward for an hour. Protective for a generation.

rest is stewardship too



The Sabbath Was Made for You

A stewardship book that never mentions rest would be managing the estate and killing the manager. So Part Five, on purpose, is about the asset you steward by putting it down.

Start with what Jesus said when the religious police caught His disciples snacking on a Saturday:

“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”

M A R K 2 : 2 7 (N I V)

Made for you. Sabbath is a gift with your name on it, older than Sinai, built into the architecture of the first week when God rested, not from exhaustion but as a signature on finished work. Somewhere along the line religion turned the gift into a regulation, and hustle culture turned refusing the gift into a badge. Both got it wrong. The seventh day isn't God demanding something from you. It's God handing something to you, weekly, and watching most of us leave it wrapped.

And when God did write it into the commandments, look at the reason Deuteronomy gives: “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt... Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day” (Deuteronomy 5:15). Sit with that logic. Slaves don't get days off. Pharaoh's economy ran on bodies that never stopped, quotas that only rose, and worth measured strictly in bricks. So when God's freed people stop working, every single week, on purpose, in public, they are making an announcement: we don't belong to Pharaoh anymore. Sabbath is a weekly emancipation proclamation. Rest is what free people do.

Now be honest about whose economy you've been living in. If your worth this week was measured in output, if rest had to be earned and never quite got earned, if stopping felt like falling behind in a race with no finish line,

that's not drive. That's Egypt with better branding. And here's the stewardship twist this whole part turns on: resting is not the opposite of managing God's assets. Your body is one of the assets. Your mind is one of the assets. The manager who runs the estate's best worker, you, into the ground is embezzling from the Owner.

The gift renews every week. This week, unwrap it.

TRY IT: PICK YOUR SABBATH

Choose your sabbath window this week: a full day if your life allows it, four guarded hours if that's what's true right now (chapter six taught you seasons). Put it in the calendar like a flight you can't miss. No work, no errands disguised as rest, no guilt. Do what fills you and honors God: worship, sleep, the people you love, the meal that takes too long. Pharaoh will text. Don't answer.

The Boat Is Allowed to Dock

Some of the most faithful people in any church are also the most tired, and they're tired in a way one good night of sleep doesn't fix. Serving on four ministries. Raising kids and parents at the same time. Being the strong one, the dependable one, the one who never says no, until the joy drains out and only the schedule is left. If that's you, this chapter was written looking you in the eye.

Watch Jesus with His exhausted staff. The disciples come back from their first ministry tour buzzing and depleted, and the crowds are so relentless that Mark records they couldn't even eat. Jesus' response is the sentence every burned-out servant needs framed:

"Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

MARK 6 : 31 (N I V)

Notice who issued the invitation. Not a therapist, not a wellness influencer: the Lord of the harvest, looking at willing workers, prescribing a boat ride away from the need. The need was still there; needs always are. Jesus pulled His people back anyway, because He stewards servants, not just service. He was the same with Himself, asleep in the stern of a storm-tossed boat, slipping away to lonely places to pray while the crowds searched for Him. The sinless Son of God napped, withdrew, and went to dinner parties, and He got it all done. Whatever we're proving with our exhaustion, He didn't need to prove it.

And to every weary person, He makes the widest offer in the Gospels: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest... For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). Check the yoke you're actually wearing, because if it's grinding you to powder, it isn't His. His is easy. The crushing yokes are the ones we accepted from elsewhere: the church culture that canonizes exhaustion, the family role

that made you everybody's savior, the voice that says your worth is your usefulness. We buried a lie back in chapter two about God being a hard master. Burnout is that same lie, worn on the body.

We told you in *When Life Falls Apart* how God restored Elijah: sleep, food, honesty, company, one small next thing. That's still the protocol, and it's still spiritual. The boat is allowed to dock, friend. The rowing will be there Monday. So will God, who was never impressed by the blisters.

TRY IT: THE QUIET PLACE

Book one boat ride this week: two hours, by yourself, quiet place, no agenda but recovery in God's presence. And if you're carrying ministry roles, do the brave audit: is there one you should hand off this season? Saying no to a good thing so you can stay alive for the right things isn't quitting. It's Mark 6:31 with your name on it.

A Living Sacrifice

Let's walk the road we came. It all belongs to God: the deed was never in your name, and that's a promotion, not a loss. Your time is the un-restockable asset, spent wisest at His feet, season by season. Your money is a servant or a god, trained by first fruits, freed by enough, and out discipling your block either way. Your generosity is bigger than your wallet: two coins, a casserole, a truck, a will. And your rest is management too, because free people stop weekly and the Owner never asked for your burnout.

Now Paul gathers every thread of it into one verse, and notice the word he lands on:

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."

R O M A N S 1 2 : 1 (N I V)

Worship. The whole-life offering, body, hours, dollars, gifts, sleep, is what Paul calls true and proper worship. Which means stewardship was never the boring committee down the hall from the real spiritual life. It is the spiritual life, the part that happens after the benediction, seven days at a time. In view of God's mercy: that's the engine. We don't offer because God is owed and angry. We offer because we've seen the cross, where the Owner opened both hands for us. Every open hand of ours is just an echo.

And a living sacrifice differs from the old kind in exactly one way: it's still alive. It gets up off the altar every morning and has to climb back on, with a calendar, a paycheck, a skill set, and a bedtime. That's why this book gave you practices instead of principles: the inventory, the honest day, the first-fruits month, the secret gift, the sabbath window. Little climbs back onto the altar. Do them until they're not exercises anymore. Just your hands, staying open, out of habit, in view of mercy.

Go back to your chapter one inventory now, the page with God's written across the top. You've walked every category on it. One question remains, the manager's question, asked of a whole life this time: *Owner, what would You like all of this doing?*

Ask it. Mean it. Then live the answer with your palms up.

It's never too late to open your hands.

TRY IT: THE OPEN-HANDS COMMITMENT

Write four sentences, one line each, and date the page. "With my time, this year: _____." "With my money: _____." "With my gifts: _____." "With my rest: _____." Tell one person at church so it becomes real. Then pray it, palms up:

"God, in view of Your mercy: it's all Yours. Manage me. Amen."

Prayers for open hands

Some moments need words, right now. Borrow these. Say them exactly as written, or change them until they sound like you. Borrowed prayers count.

O N P A Y D A Y

“God, it landed, and every dollar of it is Yours before it's mine. Direct the first portion, guard the rest from fear and foolishness, and let something in this check become bread for somebody besides me. Amen.”

W H E N M O N E Y I S T I G H T

“God, the month is longer than the money again, and my chest knows it. You said You'd never leave me, so I'm holding the promise instead of the panic. Stretch what's in the house like You stretched the loaves. Show me the next right move, and keep me too soft to be ashamed and too honest to pretend. Amen.”

B E F O R E Y O U G I V E

“God, I decided this gift in my heart and I'm bringing it with joy, not under anybody's squeeze. You watched the widow; watch me now. Let it feed somebody, and keep my name out of it. Amen.”

W H E N Y O U C A N ' T G I V E M O N E Y

“God, the wallet is empty but the hands still work. Take the hours, the skill, the casserole, the ride, the listening ear, and count them the way You counted two coins. I refuse to sit out generosity just because I'm broke. Show me today's gift that doesn't need a dollar. Amen.”

W H E N C H U R C H A S K S H A V E B U R N E D Y O U

“God, somebody used Your name to squeeze me, and I've been guarding my wallet and my heart ever since. Don't let a thief keep the keys to my generosity. Heal the flinch. Teach me the difference between a shepherd and a salesman, and make me free enough to give with joy again, on Your terms. Amen.”

W H E N T H E C A L E N D A R O W N S Y O U

“God, I’ve been worried and upset about many things, and I can’t remember the last time I sat at Your feet without checking the clock. Few things are needed. Help me quit what’s performance, keep what’s assignment, and choose the better thing before this week takes it. Amen.”

F O R T H E S A B B A T H

“God, I’m putting it down now: the phone, the hustle, the proving. I’m not Pharaoh’s and my worth is not my output. You rested with unfinished work still in the world; teach me that kind of trust. Meet me in the stopping. Amen.”

F O R T H E L E G A C Y T A L K

“God, we’re having the conversation nobody wants tonight: the will, the house, the what-happens-when. Keep the room soft. Let wisdom outrank feelings, let love outrank fear, and let what passes through our hands land on children’s children with Your fingerprints still on it. Amen.”

For the ones who let go

Friend, you made it through a church book about money and time without anybody asking you for a dime. Told you. Before you go, receive this blessing from your Community of Hope family. We mean every word.

May you never again mistake yourself for the owner, and may the demotion feel like the freedom it is.

May you hear “well done, good and faithful servant” over your two bags and never once look sideways at somebody’s five.

May your calendar confess Jesus. May you number your days like they’re worth something, quit the kitchen performance, and sit down at the feet where the permanent things are handed out.

May your money serve and never rule. May first fruits retrain your trust, may “enough” make you rich by Tuesday, and may your dollars come home from the block with testimonies.

May you give like it’s hilarious. May your two coins outweigh fortunes, your casseroles arrive before the family thinks of food, and your name mean open hands for two generations after they lay you down.

And may you rest like a free person: weekly, unapologetically, in public, because Pharaoh doesn’t own you and the Owner isn’t impressed by blisters.

To whatever gripping, tired, willing soul the Lord placed this book in front of: every good and perfect gift is still coming down. Open your hands and stand under the sky.

Where everyone has a chance.

Simple.

In the name of Jesus, who owed nothing and gave everything, by the Holy Spirit, who distributes the gifts, to the glory of the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change: amen.

Scripture index

A handful of the most important passages behind this book. Bookmark them. Read them in context, and let them find you on payday, on the tired days, and at the family table.

- Genesis 1:26-31; 2:1-3, 15
- Deuteronomy 5:12-15
- Job 1:21
- Psalm 24:1; 90:12; 139:16
- Proverbs 3:9-10; 13:22
- Ecclesiastes 3:1-8
- Malachi 3:8-12
- Matthew 6:19-24; 11:28-30; 25:14-30
- Mark 2:23-28; 6:30-32; 12:38-44
- Luke 10:38-42; 12:13-21
- Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35
- Romans 12:1-8
- 2 Corinthians 8:1-9; 9:6-11
- Ephesians 5:15-17
- 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19
- Hebrews 13:5
- James 1:17
- 1 Peter 4:10-11

Soli Deo Gloria

You're invited

Open hands were never meant to be practiced alone.

You can absolutely take everything in these pages and walk it out solo: God will honor every first fruit and every sabbath you keep. But something happens when a whole church holds its stuff loosely together that doesn't happen any other way. Casseroles that find every grief. Trucks that move every household. A community where the widow's two coins are safe and the tired servant gets sent to the boat.

That's what we are. Community of Hope AME Church started in 2006 in a nightclub with eight people and whatever was in their hands, because we believe church should meet people where they actually live. Twenty years in the making, that hasn't changed. We preach and teach Jesus unapologetically. We go into dark places and call it being the light. And we mean our name: this is a community where everyone, everyone, has a chance.

We don't care how you come. Come broke. Come guarded about money and churches, we understand more than you know. Come overworked and running on fumes. We only care about the way you leave.

P U L L U P S U N D A Y

Sundays at 10:00 AM
Crossland High School
6901 Temple Hill Rd, Temple Hills, MD 20748

C A N ' T M A K E I T I N P E R S O N ?

Watch live on YouTube: @hiphopenationtv
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WANT HELP WITH THE PRACTICALS?

Reach us at info@hiphopenation.com or 240-273-9115. Whether it's finding your serving lane, connecting with financial wisdom, or just needing somebody to pray with you about what's in your hands, our team is there. You don't have to have it together to reach out. That's rather the whole point of us.

KEEP READING: THE REST OF THE SERIES

Start Here: What Just Happened When You Said Yes, your first steps as a new believer

Just Talk: A Simple Guide to Prayer, your conversation with God

Reading the Text, Reading Your Life, how to study Scripture and your seasons

Breath and Fire: A Spirit-Filled Life for Ordinary Disciples, the Person and power inside you

When Life Falls Apart, suffering, lament, and holding on

Light in Dark Places, justice, mercy, and your neighborhood

We'll save you a seat.

— Rev. Tony Lee & the Community of Hope family

where everyone has a chance.

We'll save you a seat.

W W W . H I P H O P E N A T I O N . C O M

C O M M U N I T Y O F H O P E A M E C H U R C H

Sundays 10 AM · Crossland High School