

Small Group Guide: Open-Handed Living

Based on Mark 12

Overview

This week's sermon explored what it means to live with open hands before God and others. Drawing from the account in Mark 12 where Jesus is questioned about paying taxes to Caesar, we examined the difference between grasping tightly to what we think is ours and surrendering it all to the God who owns everything. The central challenge: are you an open-handed person or a closed-fisted person?

Key Takeaways

- The instinct to say "mine" is natural, but left unchecked it keeps us from living generously and freely.
 - When Jesus said "give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's," he was pointing to something far bigger than a tax question -- he was pointing to the reality that everything belongs to God.
 - Psalm 24:1 reminds us that the earth and everything in it belongs to the Lord, which means we are not owners but stewards.
 - We are blessed to be a blessing. God's generosity toward us is meant to flow through us to others.
 - Jesus modeled the ultimate open-handed life, culminating in giving his life on the cross for us.
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Discussion Questions

Opening Up

1. When you heard the phrase "open-handed vs. closed-fisted," what came to mind first? Would the people closest to you describe you as open-handed or closed-fisted? Why?

2. The pastor mentioned that no parent has to teach a child to say "mine." Where in your own life do you notice that instinct showing up most strongly right now?
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Digging Into the Text

3. Read Mark 12:13-17 together. Why do you think the Pharisees and Herodians, two groups that normally opposed each other, joined forces against Jesus? What does their strategy reveal about how people sometimes respond when they feel threatened?
 4. Jesus asked whose image was on the coin. The implication was that just as the coin bore Caesar's image, human beings bear the image of God. What does it mean to you personally that you are made in the image of God? How should that shape the way you think about your life and what you do with it?
 5. Psalm 24:1 says the earth and everything in it belongs to God. If you took that seriously in a practical, everyday sense, what would change about how you think about your money, your time, your career, or your relationships?
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Going Deeper

6. The pastor described a pattern of grasping throughout life -- toys as children, popularity as teenagers, career advancement as adults, security as we age. Where are you in that pattern right now? What are you most tempted to grasp for in this season of your life?
 7. The story of Leo illustrated that sometimes the most powerful thing we can offer someone is not a resource but a sense of belonging and hope. Has someone ever offered you that kind of open-handed welcome? How did it affect you?
 8. The pastor connected the sacrifice of soldiers for their country to the sacrifice of Jesus for humanity. How does reflecting on what Jesus gave up change your posture toward what you are holding onto?
 9. The "platinum rule" from John 13:34-35 calls us to love others the way Jesus loved us -- not just the way we want to be treated, but with a self-giving, sacrificial love. What would it look like for your small group to practice that kind of love together, and in your surrounding community?
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Personal Reflection

10. The pastor asked: what are you grasping for right now that God might be nudging you to release? It could be a relationship, a fear, a financial worry, a need for control, or a habit you know is not good for you. Are you willing to name it?
 11. He closed by saying that God will not always give us everything we want, but he will give us everything we need. Do you genuinely believe that? What makes it hard to trust?
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Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to put into practice before your group meets again.

Stewardship Audit Set aside 20 minutes this week to look at how you are spending your time, money, and energy. Ask honestly: does this reflect the priorities of someone who believes everything belongs to God? Write down one thing you want to adjust.

Pray the Open-Handed Prayer Each morning this week, begin your day by opening your hands physically and saying something like: "God, everything I have is yours. Show me today how to be a blessing to someone else." Pay attention to who or what comes across your path.

Pass It On Identify one specific way you have been blessed -- a skill, a resource, a relationship, extra time -- and intentionally use it to serve someone outside your immediate circle this week. Come back to the group ready to share what happened.

Have a Conversation If you are in a relationship -- married, dating, close friends, or family -- have an honest conversation about whether you are living open-handedly together. Are there areas where fear or scarcity thinking is driving your decisions?

Take a Next Step If today's message stirred something deeper -- a desire to surrender your life to Jesus, to be baptized, or to get more involved in serving your local community -- do not let that feeling pass without acting on it. Reach out to someone at your church this week.

Closing Prayer Prompt

Close your group time by having each person finish this sentence out loud as part of a group prayer:

"God, I want to open my hands and give you _____."

"We are blessed to be a blessing."