

We are in week two of our Open Handedness series. Last week, we looked at the foundation of what it means to live a life open-handed to the things of God, and we said that the foundation of that life is one of gratitude, of recognizing that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it. We focused at a high level about what it is to cultivate or create a life where we are able to live open-handed.

This morning and the next two weeks, we want to drill a little bit more into the practical, to bring it from that 30,000-foot view down onto the ground. Today, we want to look at what it means to live open-handedly with our time and talents. Here is how we define this habit of open-handedness.

Open-handedness is the habit of stewarding our time, talents, and treasures as channels through which God's abundance flows to others.

We believe that the posture of a follower of Jesus is someone who has received the transformation of God through the life and work of the Spirit, through the work of Jesus on the cross alone.

Then that wells up in us a response where we begin to live open-handed from that posture, where we recognize all of who we are. It is not the things that we own, but rather we steward them and they become the channel through which God's abundance flows to the world around us.

That is different language, but this is from the very beginning of the story. Abraham was blessed to be a blessing. That's a little more of an Old Testament language. That's always been the story. God works through a people and he blesses them for the purpose, not of their own enrichment, but rather so they can be a blessing to the world around them. In some sense, we are the hands, feet, eyes, and words of Jesus in the world around us.

So what does it mean to live open-handed with all that God has given us? I invite you to turn to the book of 1 Corinthians. I want us to see that the central point of Paul's message, not just in Corinthians, but throughout all of his New Testament writings, is what the New Testament scholar, Michael Gorman, calls cruciform, which is conformity to the crucified Christ. This is at the very heart and center of Paul's message.

It helps us make sense of what he means by that text in 1 Corinthians 10. Paul is writing not just as a theologian, of course, he was one, and not just as a pastor, of course, he is one, but he writes as a fellow follower of Jesus. He's exhorting this congregation in Corinth to alter their patterns of living and their patterns of experience in the world to cultivate a cruciform life.

In some ways, you can summarize the way of Jesus as conforming to the crucified Christ. I don't in any way want to diminish what I mean by what I say next. But it's important to catch that crucified is the crux of what it is because for Paul, the crucifixion of Jesus, his death, and his subsequent resurrection don't just mean the redemptive work of Jesus on the cross. That alone is a profound mystery, a beautiful gift that God has done. But for Paul, the cross is also the pattern or the filter through which we see our own life. Then that becomes the example that we seek to implement in every aspect of our lives.

So the cross of Christ is the redemptive work of Jesus, and the filter through which we see all of life around us. Let's do a little tour of the text, and you'll see why this might sound a little confusing, but hopefully, we'll make sense of it. You'll see it throughout this book in 1 Corinthians. So look at 1 Corinthians 1. After Paul does some clearing of the throat at the beginning, he does an opening prayer for the letters and the recipients of the letter, then he says this:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." 1 Corinthians 1:18-19

Right at the beginning, Paul is contrasting the way of the cross with the way of the world. He says that when you come to see all that Jesus has done on the cross, the redemptive work is foolishness to the world around us. It doesn't make sense. It's confounding. How does someone dying on a cross, an innocent man laying his life down, bring about that salvation?

But then he's moving it further in where it's now, not just that it is confounding. But when you begin to live a cruciform life in the shape of the cross, where that becomes the example for the pattern of living in our world, that confounds it all the more. If we are to emulate Christ, not as saviors, that's Jesus and him alone, but rather the filters through which we see the world are exemplified by laying down our lives for the sake of others. That is total foolishness to the world around us. It doesn't make sense. That is not how we would define power. If anything, that would be defined as the laying down of power, the releasing of that.

Paul says that the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved, it is the power of God. It's a paradox in the Christian life that through our weakness, Christ has made us strong. Through laying down our life, we find life, and through serving others, that is actually

how we bring about influence. In 1 Corinthians 2, Paul is taking this concept of cruciform, and he layers it onto his vocation, the very work he does.

And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Paul's reflecting back to this church and saying that when he was with them, the only thing he knew was Christ crucified, that cruciform ethics. He was saying that was the thing that he preached, that he brought, it was the whole of the story—Jesus Christ and him crucified. He says that the whole reason he did that is counter to what we'd understand about the way the world works. He says he did that so that in his weakness they could see that God is strong, so that they were not swayed by the eloquence of Paul's words or by human wisdom, but by Jesus and him crucified alone.

It's Paul filtering the time and talents that he has, the time with them, and the skillset that he'd been given, the calling, the vocation to preach the gospel, and submitting it to Jesus Christ and him crucified. Everything Paul was about was about revealing the crucified Jesus in both the means in which he did his work as well as the thing that he proclaimed.

Now, part of why this is foolishness that we often miss is that we've domesticated this image of the cross. We wear it around our necks, which there's nothing wrong with that, but we wear it around our necks. We wear it on bracelets. We adorn it as decoration. But what we often forget is that the cross was the high point of the first-century Roman rulers' cruelty, power, and violence. It was a violent type of death.

So in the first century, if you were to hear Paul saying that he came just to proclaim Christ, crucified, it would almost hit you like you're claiming defeat as victory, for the cross was, in all intents and purposes, in the first century, defeat. It was the emblematic power of Rome over all others. It was how they squelched any movement that might threaten the powers to be. Paul just says that this is the thing I crucify. Through weaknesses is strength, the paradox at the heart of the Christian life.

As we come to live open-handed, what we are doing is realizing the earth is the Lord's and everything in it. Also, everything about us is for the sake of others in the same way that the cross was Jesus forsaking the deity he had. That's Paul in Philippians 2,

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own

advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Philippians 2:6-8

A profoundly beautiful text, and at the very heart of everything that Paul does. For most of the rest of the letter, Paul will take this cruciform ethic, this idea that all of life is filtered through the redemptive work that Jesus has done for each of us and then filtering it out into the way that we operate in the world. He begins to aim it at these different issues that are facing the church in Corinth. It's almost like he's working out this idea in the aspect of that community. Let's look at 1 Corinthians 4. Paul is speaking into some specific issues but attune your ear for the ways that he decenters the self and elevates the work of Christ.

For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not? Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign—and that without us! How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you! For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment. 1 Corinthians 4:7-13

I don't know how you say the things that Paul said there at the end, unless you understand that your life is not your own. Where he is saying, when this way of Jesus, which is foolishness to the world around us, when we begin to live into that self-giving love that's in the shape of the cross, what will naturally happen is the world will look on that as foolish, and it will not look like we all want it to look. It won't look like success. But Paul says we don't respond to that out of more anger and hatred. He says, when we're cursed, we bless. When people are cruel to us, we respond with kindness because we're ordered around a different reality.

I hope you hear the echoes of the Sermon on the Mount in this whole concept of the kingdom of God being a present reality that we're living into. So we're learning to live in light of that different reality. When that reality is overlapping with the reality of this world, it will have that effect of like oil and water. We will live a different life, a different world. We'll live open-handed,

we'll view our time, talents, and treasures through a completely different lens.

At times, that'll bump up against the world. The work that we have to do then is not to respond in kind. The way of the world is that old creation dying off. He says, we are called to something different. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless. When we are persecuted, we endure it. When we are slandered, we answer kindly. There's a word for us today, Church. Because what I often find in the heart of myself and others is when we experience that kind of thing, what I watch over and over, is the church responding in kind, and Jesus is saying, "This is a different reality." That's not a cruciform way to live.

We don't respond to slander with more slander. It's not who we are. We are ordered in a different way. Paul says that the cruciform way is to respond to cursing with blessing, respond to slander with kindness, may it be so in us. Paul goes on in chapter 6.

Here, Paul is speaking specifically of sexuality and sexual ethics, but you'll see these hints of a broader ethic. That's all I'm trying to do is let you see this theme that just presents throughout the text.

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Here, he's speaking specifically to sexuality and sexual ethics, but that same thing permeates just like it did before. It's the idea that a cruciform ethic recognizes that we are not our own. We live open-handed with who we are. That we are called to the obedience of God, we were bought at a price. Do we see that? It's the invitation to keep living into this cruciform life.

So let's review just to breathe a little bit to see the forest for the trees. In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul says that the cross is foolishness. 1 Corinthians 2, he says that he knows nothing but Christ crucified. 1 Corinthians 4, he says that what do you have that you did not receive? Everything has been given to you, and therefore, respond differently. And 1 Corinthians 6 says that we are not our own. Stop viewing the world through our own lens.

Let's flip to 1 Corinthians 10. We'll begin to turn a corner and hopefully pull the thread that helps things make sense into the topic of vocation and work. *"I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but not everything is constructive. 1 Corinthians 10:23*

Now, in your Bible, those first phrases are probably in quotations, and that's because Paul is quoting a popular idiom from the first century that was, "I have the right to do anything." That sounds like it could echo today. My freedom, my rights. Paul is saying, "Yeah, you say you have the right to do everything, but

mind you, not everything is beneficial." He is speaking to the church, speaking to the followers of Jesus.

"No one should seek their own good, but the good of others" (v. 24). Do you see and hear the cruciform ethic? That is what Jesus was doing on the cross. He was not considering divinity, something to be grasped, but he poured it out for the sake of others. The cross is the filter through which we see the world, and the cross is the high point of love. It is the ethic of Jesus' kingdom of God. It is self-giving love for the sake of others.

Paul says that he understands that we have freedom to do whatever we want, but don't lose the forest for the truth. Don't forget the thing that organizes this whole thing, this cruciform understanding of the world around us. Let's look at that in verse 25.

Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. 1 Corinthians 10:25-27

Hear how he's churning the thing, saying not to get so caught up in all the law keeping as to miss the fact that someone is in front of you who you can love. He says that if you are invited over and they place something before you, eat whatever it is that's put before you without raising questions of conscience.

But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience. I am referring to the other person's conscience, not yours. For why is my freedom being judged by another's conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for? So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10:28-31

Here's the point where it's all been pushing towards. Paul has talked through all these issues, and then he lands at this one. This was a debate that was raging in the first century about whether Christians can eat meat that was sacrificed or sold off from a temple of Zeus or some other God. The meat would be brought to the meat market, but it was used at some temple, and they'd repurpose it. There was all this debate raging about if a Christian can partake in that.

Notice the way Paul links it back to Psalm 24. The Earth is the Lord's and everything in it. So whether it was used in that manner or not, it's ultimately God's. Paul says that there is peace. But then he goes on and says in this debate that whether you eat or drink, do everything to the glory of God. The target of Christians is that we're living, we're aiming everything of our lives toward glorifying God.

Paul is drawing this from the most ordinary, mundane, simple things, like eating and drinking, to everything in between.

Whatever it is that you do, do it for the glory of God. Now, have you ever read that and wondered how in the world someone does dishes for the glory of God? How do I go about my job through this cruciform ethic? What does this mean for me to approach balancing a budget sheet for the glory of God? What does it mean to commute my kids to school and drop them off for the glory of God? What does it mean to spend my time in my neighborhood for the glory of God?

Here's the challenge. We've bought this divide between the sacred and the secular, in which it's easy for you all to see, that what I'm doing now as work that glorifies God. Preaching a sermon, leading worship is pretty explicit. That makes sense. And for some of you, that's also your work. You might work in a Christian sphere or work for a nonprofit or somewhere where you're openly able to talk about Jesus, which can be an easy on-ramp to how you glorify God.

The reality is that the majority of you are not in a role like mine where your work directly glorifies God. But if Paul says whatever you do, he can't just mean that we need more preachers. What we need is somehow to understand Paul, because Paul is saying there is a way to do everything that brings about the glory of God. How do you glorify God when your work doesn't directly do that? Or maybe you're in an environment where it's against company policy to talk about faith and religion. How do you glorify God in that work? Well, the first way to understand that is we need to understand the word glory. This is a theme that permeates the scriptures, and all of it is built on the concept that we see so pervasively in the Old Testament.

The Hebrew word for glory is the word *Kavod*, which literally means glory, but it also means weighty or heavy. What exactly does that mean? Let's start by talking about what it isn't. A common misconception is to equate the glory of God with the fame of God. We think of it as God is made famous. But I want to dispel that this morning. The reason we tend to think of that is because whenever we hear the phrase like all glory to God, it tends to be in moments where an athlete just won a championship or some artist received a trophy, and they're like all glory to God, which I'm not here to judge their heart. That could very well be what they intend. But we filter it through the lens of they have this big platform. So when they say all glory to God, we can see it as meaning to make God more famous.

That's not what glory means. Glory is not God's fame. And if I could be so bold, I'm not quite sure we can make God more famous anyway, he's already known through the vast majority of the world. So I don't think it means his fame. Let's look at Ezekiel 43. This is one story of many throughout the Old Testament where you get a picture of the glory of God, not as some abstract thing, but as a very real, tangible reality.

The prophet, Ezekiel, has this vision: *"Then the man brought me to the gate facing east, and I saw the glory [Kavod] of the God of Israel coming from the east" (Ezekiel 43:1-2a)*. So just pause there. Already, we know now the glory of God must be a thing because that thing is coming from somewhere.

His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory. The vision I saw was like the vision I had seen when he came to destroy the city and like the visions I had seen by the Kebar River, and I fell face down. vv. 2b-3

Whenever you see someone fall face down, it's generally out of fear of the Lord and in a posture of worship. So there's something about the glory of God that provoked Ezekiel to fall down in worship. *"The glory of the Lord entered the temple through the gate facing east. Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple" (vv. 4-5)*.

So what do we see in this vision? Ezekiel is having this moment in which he's watching the glory of God come from the east, and he says, multiple times, it fills the temple. Then there was that little line that said, "The land was radiant with his glory." What the glory of God is, is not his fame, but I would summarize it as his presence and beauty.

Presence

The glory of the Lord is the presence. It filled the temple. It entered into it. It was there. So the glory, the *Kavod* is the presence, meaning it filled the temple. Over and over again in the scriptures, you see this imagery, through the prophets, about the glory of God filling the temples. It's not some distant, far-off thing, but something close by. It's what we've talked about. The overlap of heaven and earth, that is the glory of God.

Beauty

Second, it's his beauty. It's the land that was radiant with his glory. It means that there's something in this that caused Ezekiel to fall down in worship when he experienced the presence and the goodness of God. His proper response, so is ours, is to worship the beauty of God. See, this presence and beauty are in fact what glory means. Look at this in Psalm 19:1-4. It's the text I used for our call to worship

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun. Psalm 19:1-4

How do the mountains speak of the glory of God if the glory of God is his presence and his beauty, but here the psalmist is saying that the heavens are declaring it in the same way, he says, but not with words. So it's not that they're just up in the sky. It's

not like the star is just sitting there singing a worship song for all of eternity, and that's how it glorifies God.

How does a mountain speak to the glory of God? It does so by being a mountain. How does this star speak of the glory of God? It does so by being a star. How does the oceanside declare the glory of God? It does so by being an ocean. Because when you are encountered with these things, is this not where you experience the presence of God in a unique way, caught up in the beauty of what he's done, and it evokes something within you?

Just a couple of weeks ago, I went on my annual silent retreat. I go to this place down south of Big Sur. It's right there on Highway 1, which, when it's open, I would argue it's the most beautiful place in the world. I don't know of a better drive than Highway 1 through the Big Sur area. Every year, I go to this monastery that's located there. The whole property is a silent property, meaning you don't eat with anyone, you don't talk with anyone. The only voices you hear when you go, if you choose, is prayer with the monks three times a day. Of course I do that, it's really fun. So I go and pray with the monks, but other than that, it's utterly silent. There's no cell phone coverage, there's nothing in this place, and you cannot help but be caught up in the presence and beauty of God, not through what is spoken, but by the sheer grandeur of that place.

There's a bench that I sit on that sits about 800 feet above the ocean floor. I sit there and look at the view for hours. That's not hyperbole because there's nothing else to do. You just sit there, and you look at it. I'm telling you, I sit there for hours each year I've gone, and I've yet to get tired of the view. It does something to you when you sit in the presence and beauty of God. It preaches the glory of God in ways that I can't fathom. The sunset that took place last time had clouds covering the ocean like a blanket, a pool of clouds in which the sun was setting over it. Sitting there, it is hard not to be caught up in the presence of God.

However, the reality is that two people can look at the sunset and see something very different. I can be there and caught up in the wonderful beauty and presence of God, but others will look at that and say that it is just changing weather patterns, and the synapses in your brain that fire and trigger different things. That's true. I mean, all of that is, in fact, what's happening in our brains, which is registering as we perceive light through our eyes and it's refracted in through our consciousness.

I think of the words of Jesus that he said so many times in the New Testament—for those who have eyes to see, they will see. So the reality is that not all of us, not everyone, will see the glory of God, as it reflects the presence and beauty of God. Others will see a sunset like that, and they'll see color, and they may even be caught up in its beauty, but they are thinking, "Isn't evolution amazing? Isn't this wonderful?" And that's okay. If you're there, that's part of the journey of beginning to see, and you are

so welcome here. That is okay. I'm just naming that two people might see this different reality.

So then now let's, let's come back to what Paul had said in 1 Corinthians 10:31. "*So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*" But now let's think of this text with that understanding of glory as presence and beauty, and let's talk about what it means then to glorify God. To glorify God is his presence and his beauty. That means that our task in whatever we do is to help people see that which they can't see, to help people see the presence of God.

Almost like a tour guide through life, we're pointing out the presence and beauty of God. We're walking through with our neighbors, with our coworkers, pointing out the presence of God. It's in the very work you do. The very thing you do, whether it's directly connected to glorifying God or indirectly, what you are doing, is trying to help those who can't see, to see the presence and beauty of God.

Because here's the thing, you can look at that sunset and you can have that experience, but I'm guessing maybe you've also had that experience around a table eating a meal that transcends your mind. You're like, "That is the most incredible steak I've ever had," or "That is a wonderful croissant," which is wonderful. Whatever it is that just seems to connect with something bigger. So you can have these experiences sitting 800 feet above the ocean, or you can have this in the small, minute ways. You can look at a piece of furniture and be caught up in its beauty and the creativity of someone who had that idea and then manifested it into the world. You can get caught up as you look at a work of art in a painting.

So you can't make that sunset, but you can, in fact, paint it. You can create something that projects that into the world. You can take the disorder of a budget that seems chaotic and out of control, and when you bring order, all of a sudden, you're reflecting the very character of God that took chaos and creates order. See, in everything you do, glorify God.

Paul had the vision that no matter what your work is, you can find ways to bring about the presence and beauty of God. This happens in two ways, and I took these from a book named *Garden City* by John Mark Comer. He says that there are two ways in which you can glorify God.

The Work You Do

The first is the work you do. We've talked a lot about this over the past few weeks. It's the idea of playing again with God's Lego. The very things you create can point people to the presence and the beauty of God. Now, there are things we can create that are damaging it against that. That's the work of the follower of Jesus to analyze it. What is the work that I do? What is the vocation that I have? Where do I spend the lion's share of my time? Whether paid or unpaid, that doesn't make a difference

because vocation is higher than that. Vocation is something God has bestowed on you to create and cultivate good in the world.

So, how does the work you do reshape the things of this world? Do they help people see the invisible God? Do they, in some indirect way, find an avenue that provokes them for those with eyes to see that there is a God behind all of this? We as Christians live according to a different bottom line. It isn't self-focused; rather, it's other-focused. That's the cruciform ethic, where our bottom line is not focused on generating the biggest income or the greatest efficiency. In some ways, for the Christian, that is a take it or leave it. That may happen. It may not happen. But that's not the aim.

Rather, the aim is how can we create and build and work and go about our work towards the glory of God? That's our bottom line. You can't make a tree, but you can reshape it into a credenza. You can't make the world, but you can remake it into a latte or a book of poetry, or a classroom, or a meal, or an app, or a business. You can do a thousand different things in whatever you can imagine, and all of those things have the potential to point to the presence and beauty of God in this world.

Our primary task of living open-handed, I believe, is becoming great at what we do so that it reflects the greatness of God, not for our own glory, not to extend our own weighty sacredness, but rather as channels for the abundance of God.

The Way You Work

But it isn't just what we do, it's also the way we work. Because I also recognize in a room this size that not everyone has the privilege of controlling the work done for some of you. I mean, the sweet spot is when you can control what you do and the way you do it, and they intersect.

But not all of us have that opportunity. Some of us just show up and work this job, and my boss tells me to do this, and I just have to do it, and that's okay. I understand that reality. There's nothing wrong with that. But don't miss that to glorify God can also mean the way in which you go about your work.

Remember that sermon a while back from Genesis 1, in which we talked about how we are created in the image and likeness of God. Meaning the way we go about our work can also reflect the glory of God when we reflect the qualities of God. God is creative, so we are creative. God is hardworking, so we are hardworking. God is honest and trustworthy, so we are honest and trustworthy, even if it means fewer sales and fewer commissions.

If God is good, if God is love, the way we show up to our work can just as well reflect the glory of God in the way we work. We

can, in fact, reflect love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control all in a way that mirrors or points back to the very glory of God.

Paul says in whatever you do, from as mundane as eating and drinking to everything else that we spend our lives doing, do it for the *Kavod* of God. See, when we take our ordinary everyday work and mix in a holy intent, and we seek to make it an act of worship before God, the mundane is transformed into something weighty and sacred. It's transformed into an offering to God. When we infuse the ordinary stuff of life with holy intent, we make even the most seemingly trivial tasks, artifacts and objects of God's glory.

Whether you have a well-ordered home with a life of kids, a classroom of third graders, or a code that helps present software to the world, all of those things have the potential to be objects of the glory of God, extensions of the image and likeness of God that's been built in. We take our time and our talents, and we don't hold them for our own purposes, but we live with open hands and say, "God, what would you like to create through me? What is it that you would like to bring about through my life?"

To glorify God in our work is to live open-handed with our time and our talents, offering them to the glory of God in whatever we do. Paul says that in whatever you do, do it for the glory of God. Church, may it be so in us.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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Catalog No. 1494-4FC