

Open Your Palm Wide

You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. (Psalm 145:16)

Scripture: Psalm 145:13–21

Song: “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”

When our oldest daughter was in college and one of her rare weekends at home was wrapping up, she circled her grandparents’ living room to give goodbye hugs to all. But when she got to her dad, something changed. After their hug, Elizabeth held out her right hand, rubbed her fingers together, and opened her palm wide to ask for cash. Everyone laughed, but the girl received what she knew her dad could give.

Psalm 145 paints a vivid picture of God’s posture toward us. He is not stingy or close-fisted. No! His ears are open to our cries (v. 19), and His hands are open wide, ready to satisfy our desires (v. 16). He is trustworthy and able to provide.

What are you asking God for today? Perhaps it’s resources, friendship, or future plans. Maybe you need healing for your mind, body, or broken heart. Whether your need is big or small, be bold and expectant. When you open your palm to Him, know His hand is already open to you. He is faithful in providing all you need.

Father, I look to You. Hear my cry as I open my hands to the One who alone can satisfy and fill me with all I need. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

September 8–14. **Lenae Bulthuis** lives with her husband, Mike, on a Minnesota grain and livestock farm. She enjoys her family, strong coffee, and long conversations about Jesus and His grace.

The Key to a Changed Life

Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. (Matthew 3:8)

Scripture: Matthew 3:4–12

Song: “Change My Heart, O God”

Our youngest daughter, known for her quiet nature, jumped into her 18th year from an airplane. The 13,000-foot skydiving jump was a crazy distance to fall. But the greater leap for those who knew the birthday girl came from how starkly out of character this was for a self-proclaimed homebody.

The premise of today’s reading is one of radical change. John the Baptist preached a message of repentance. Some responded by confessing their sins and turning their lives over to God. But the Jewish religious leaders did not. They dug in the heels of their hearts, refusing to budge from their traditions or turn toward God. So John warned them to change their hearts and “produce fruit in keeping with repentance.”

Repentance is key to a changed life. When we repent by confessing our sins and turning toward God, He changes our hearts, which begins to change everything else. The fruit of repentance is new behaviors and character, proof of a changed heart and life. Using our words to lie, manipulate, or gossip becomes out of character. It’s out of character to be prideful, unforgiving, or selfish. But what if we still fail and fall, whether in an unintentional stumble or a 13,000-foot nose dive? In either case, His love invites us to return to Him. Jesus forgives us, picks us up, and helps us walk changed and in step with Him again.

Father, thank You for the forgiveness and new life found in Jesus. Change my heart so that my life produces fruit in keeping with repentance. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Truth for the Tired

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.” (Acts 3:19)

Scripture: Acts 3:12–20

Song: “Refresh Me”

As a teenage girl who slept in whenever possible, I never understood my father’s morning routine. As a dairy farmer, he could’ve slept until 5 a.m. before milking the cows, which was early enough! But he chose to get up at 4 a.m. to spend an uninterrupted hour in prayer and Bible study. That time was valuable to my dad because his refreshment came from being with God.

In Acts 3, Peter confronts the crowd with the truth that Jesus, whom they had disowned and handed over to be killed, is alive. They put to death the author of life, but God raised Him from the dead and now invites them (and us) into a new life. The Messiah has come, and He offers refreshment and forgiveness.

Teenage girls are tired, and they’re not the only ones. Exhaustion, burnout, and fatigue are the norm in today’s society. Yet no amount of sleep, vacation days, vitamins, or self-care can give energy to an exhausted soul. The truth for the spiritually tired is that real refreshment comes from a relationship with Jesus. When we repent and turn to God, Jesus wipes out sin, our biggest problem, and then He does what only He can do: He refreshes us from the inside out. In His presence there is hope, peace, shelter, and rest.

Father, I’m tired and weary. Nothing can satisfy but You. Refresh me in Your presence. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Always Time to Pray

Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. (James 5:13)

Scripture: James 5:12–18

Song: “Lord, I Need You”

In our small high school, we could rely on our music teacher, Mrs. B., like clockwork. Everyone knew that if you asked her to pray, she would. First, she’d pray with you on the spot. Then, with a simple but predictable gesture, she’d remove her wristwatch and put it back on with the face upside down as her intentional reminder to continue praying for you.

James concludes his letter by imploring the church to pray in faith. Our prayers are powerful and effective. James gives specific instructions. Are you in trouble? Pray. Are you happy? Sing songs of praise. Are you sick? Call the leaders and pray. His message is clear. We need God at all times and in all places. It is always time to pray.

Though timely, we don’t need a wristwatch to be prompted to pray. Praise opportunities abound—a new day, a new job, or a phone call from an old friend. Prayer prompts for those in trouble are everywhere! An argument, an ambulance siren, or an anxious teen’s outbursts are all prayer alerts. We need God. It’s time to pray. And while we may *say* it’s always time to pray, the evidence of what we really believe about prayer is seen in how much time we spend in doing so.

Father, I need You. Thank You for the open invitation to pray anytime, anywhere, about anything. Hear my prayers and move for Your glory, I ask. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Only Jesus

“The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.”
(Exodus 12:13)

Scripture: Exodus 12:3–14

Song: “Not What My Hands Have Done”

The first time I started reading through the Bible, I was eight years old. I began in Genesis but abruptly stopped in Leviticus. There’s some strange stuff in Leviticus, especially when you’re eight. But the even bigger problem was that I got the Bible flip-flopped. Rather than looking for God’s message through *Jesus*, I made it a book about me. How am *I* supposed to live? What am *I* supposed to do?

The Egyptians had enslaved the Israelite community for 400 years. There was nothing God’s people could do to save themselves. They needed a Rescuer. In Exodus 12, God does just that through the Passover. When God saw the lamb’s blood on their houses, He passed over them. He saved their lives and secured their freedom.

The Hebrews couldn’t have known that Passover pointed forward to Jesus, the Lamb of God (John 1:29). Jesus shed His blood for the sins of all people. He died to secure our freedom from death, and He rose so we could live. The storyline of Scripture is Jesus, only Jesus and always Jesus. It’s not about what we must do, but what Jesus did for us. Then, knowing God’s story, we can live a good story—a story that points people to Him.

Father, thank You for forgiveness, freedom, and life in Jesus. Thank You for all He has done for me. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Worship that Counts

“There, in the presence of the LORD your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the LORD your God has blessed you.” (Deuteronomy 12:7)

Scripture: Deuteronomy 12:5–12

Song: “House of the Lord”

There were 26 students in my sixth-grade class. I remember because there was a head count every time we got on and off the school bus for a field trip. Each of us mattered, and we belonged together. No one would be left behind.

Moses was getting the Israelites ready for life in the promised land. In Deuteronomy 12, he describes the system of sacrificial worship for the people of God. God would guide them to the place of worship and specify what they should bring. They were to come with their best offerings, all their people, and hearts full of praise. As a community, they were to worship with joy and gratitude. They were to thank God for who He is and all He provides.

God still invites us to worship in community, not out of ritual but to rejoice in our salvation in Jesus Christ. We don't gather to count heads but to count His blessings. His people belong together. But are people in our faith communities being left behind? Are we missing the joy of worshiping God together? Gathering with God's people matters. It draws us closer to God and one another. Who can you invite to Bible study or church today?

Father, I worship You and thank You for Your blessings. Teach me to prioritize worshiping with Your people. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Come!

“If you return to the LORD, then your fellow Israelites and your children will be shown compassion by their captors and will return to this land, for the LORD your God is gracious and compassionate. He will not turn his face from you if you return to him.” (2 Chronicles 30:9)

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 30:1–9, 26–27

Song: “God So Loved”

As the nurse removed the cuff from my arm, she was concerned. My blood pressure had skyrocketed since my last doctor’s visit—five years ago! I was concerned that my doctor would be upset with me for neglecting my health, and even more, I was stressed that he would find something seriously wrong.

God had commanded the Israelites to celebrate the annual Passover festival as a reminder of His deliverance. However, years had slipped by without them doing so. When King Hezekiah reinstated Passover in 2 Chronicles 30, the Israelites may have wondered how God would react to their unfaithfulness. But King Hezekiah directed them to God’s heart, assuring them that “the LORD your God is gracious and compassionate.”

God is always inviting us back to Himself. His invitation is constant and personal: “Come.” Come, no matter how far you’ve strayed or how long you’ve turned from Him. God’s face is toward you, and His heart is love. But His invitation requires a response. Don’t wait another year or even a day if you feel distant from God. The time to return to Him is now.

Father, thank You for Your faithfulness and love. Draw me nearer to You today. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.