

I'm not a dancer, as you can see. Well, that looks like I am, but I'm not a dancer, and I'm not totally happy about that either.

I'd much rather be more comfortable with dancing, but I guess it's partly because for a middle-aged man, you don't dance very often apart from at weddings. Is that fair to say?

Yeah, and weddings tend to happen on Saturday nights, and Saturday nights are followed by Sunday mornings.

And Sunday morning, I'm a pastor, and I might add a lot of weddings because I'm a pastor, but Sunday morning, I'm standing in front of a lot of the people that I would have been dancing with, and yeah, I feel like that's a bit awkward.

But it is a wonderful thing, I think, to see the unbridled joy on the dance floor of a wedding. Would you agree? I don't know how people know the song words.

Suddenly, people that are conservative, they get on the dance floor, they know every word, and I'm reminded with shame that I never learnt the nutbush. So I can't even join in to things like that.

I would have thought I went to enough 18th birthday parties as a kid. But I think of dancing on the wedding night floor, and I think it's a wonderful thing. Smiles and reckless abandon of movement for fun, for joy, to celebrate a meaningful occasion.

And that's what a wedding is, of course. The bride and groom have been joined by God in holy matrimony, and it's an event worthy of celebration.

Today, we finish our series entitled Blessed to Be a Blessing. We've looked mainly in Genesis at God's plan to bless. His heart is to bless his people, and he wants them to be a conduit of blessing to the world.

We looked at Genesis 22 and saw that there's a cost typically involved in seeing that blessing taken from God to the world. Today, we finish and we look at the joy of blessing.

In Deuteronomy 14, God asks the people to give an offering, a tithe of their produce, for the purpose of celebration. He asks people to give so that they could celebrate the giver of every good gift, the living God, our Father God.

Many people think God asks for offerings because he wants something from us. But what if sometimes God asks for offerings because he wants something for us? Can you see the difference?

He wants freedom for us. He wants trust. He wants worship.

He wants community. He wants celebration. He wants his blessing to move through us and beyond us.

Last week, we saw in Genesis 22 that Abraham held the blessing of his son, the promise that was given to him, and he waited 25 years to receive. He held that blessing with open hands.

The greatest blessing from God he'd ever received, but he didn't clench his fists around that blessing. He held it with open hands.

So today we're going to think about what it means to have open hands with the blessings of God. Number one, open hands remember the giver. We're in Deuteronomy 14.

If you'd like to turn to it, please do. This is a tremendous passage of scripture about the joy of blessing. Deuteronomy 14, I'm reading from verse 22.

Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year.

Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the first born of your herds and flocks in the presence of the Lord your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his name, so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God always.

The Bible says a lot about remembering. Memory is very important, especially in the Old Testament. God gives his people rhythms to build their lives around, around shared memories that they are to celebrate and recall and remember.

About who God is and what he has done. The feasts that we yearly, we're all about reinforcing memory. I really appreciated a book by a psychiatrist called Kurt Thompson, and it was called *The Soul of Shame*.

Kurt Thompson teaches that memory is not simply a mental filing cabinet of past events. Memory is active, embodied, relational, and future-shaping. He says, we don't merely recall the past.

Our memories help us anticipate what is coming and interpret what is happening now. Thompson says, memory is as much about predicting the future as it is about recalling the past. Think about it.

Repeated thoughts, feeling stories, and relational experiences form pathways in our brains. What we rehearse becomes what we remember. What we remember becomes what we expect, and what we expect shapes how we live.

Let me read that again. I think that's a good little quote. What we rehearse becomes what we remember.

What we remember becomes what we expect, and what we expect shapes how we live. Shame repeats a dark story. You are alone.

You are exposed. You are not enough. No one's coming.

Over time, that story becomes deeply embedded. But memory can be reformed in community, in prayer, in embodied practices, and repeated attention to God's truer story.

We can starve shame over time by turning our attention towards something larger than shame. The good news that Jesus Christ has taken our shame on the cross and given us new life through faith in Him. Blessing is not only provision for the moment.

Blessing becomes memory, and memory becomes formation. When God's people repeatedly remember His goodness, tell the stories, sing the songs, share the meals, build the altars, and rehearse the testimony, joy gets written deeper into the soul.

What we repeatedly remember, we become ready to believe again. Always ready. Here in Deuteronomy 14, God teaches His people to give a tithe of their produce back to God to remember.

To remember that everything they own, everything they receive, everything they produce, is ultimately a gift from heaven.

Tithings, giving free will offerings back to God, reminded the people that the land, the rain, the harvest, the flocks, the oil, the wine, the grain, all of it came from God. When we live with open hands, we remember where the blessings come from.

Amen. And we live out of gratitude, not entitlement. Think of a mum whose birthday is coming up and she's got a young child.

Not too young that they can't buy something from the shops, but they're still a young child. So she gives the child money to buy her a present. The child goes out and buys the present, wraps it up, presents it proudly to mum.

What do you think mum's thinking? Mum is not thinking, finally I've received what I needed. Isn't she thinking, how wonderful that my child is learning about love and gratitude and participation and joy?

Surely that's what it's like with God when he invites us to give. It's not because he needs it. He's inviting us into the joy of giving.

The text says that I just read, so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God always. It's a nice little line, I think, linking to our theme for the next two years, to be always ready, that you may learn to revere the Lord your God always.

Secondly, open hands enter the joy of God.

If that place is too distant and you have been blessed by the Lord your God and you cannot carry your tithe because the place where the Lord will choose to put his name is so far away, then exchange your tithe for silver and take the silver with you

and go to the place the Lord your God will choose. Use the silver to buy whatever you like, cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink or anything you wish.

Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice. Did you hear that? Did you take that on what we just read?

God was asking for an offering, a tithe, so the people could do what? Have a party, celebrate. Use the silver from your grain to buy whatever you want, to share and eat in the presence of God.

God is saying, I want you to remember who blesses you. I want you to have a grand feast to celebrate. The goal of giving is not misery, it's joy rightly centred on God.

When we get back to the illustration of a wedding, now you could go over the top and spend too much on a wedding, but most of the time, I don't hear people at the end of a wedding say, that was such a waste. Why did I spend all that money?

Because hopefully, it's a one time celebration that is worthy of some expense. It's a really big and sometimes exorbitant party to celebrate the joining of two people. Have you discovered that celebration is worthy of some expense?

Joy is found in the celebrating of that which is worthy of it. We are, Lord willing, going on long service leave this week for five weeks. And part of what we're doing is we've, Leanne and I have, what do you do it, rented some units in Queensland.

Part of our family is up there with three grandchildren in Queensland. And so we have four kids, four adult kids, and we're sort of all going up with spouses and kids and grandkids, and having a holiday together.

It's the first time we've been that far away, but Leanne and I are paying for the accommodation. But it's a joy to do so, isn't it?

When it's a time to celebrate God's goodness to us, and we're so blessed and so grateful for the family He has given us.

But I think it's an example that's just like this happening in the Old Testament, where God is like, bring in your tithes, because I want you to celebrate me and yourselves in community.

We give out of our blessing at a cost, but for the joy of knowing God. The kingdom of God is frequently presented as a feast. Have you noticed that?

Eden begins with abundance. Israel worships through feasts many times in the year. Psalm 23 says, You prepare a table before me.

Jesus' ministry is full of meals. The prodigal son returns to a feast. The Bible ends with the wedding supper of the lamb.

From beginning to end, God's blessing is moving towards a table. Have you ever noticed that? It's moving towards a table, a table of celebration.

So we have open hands, remember God's provision, open hands enter the joy of the Lord, and open hands make room for others.

Deuteronomy 14 continues in verse 27, Do not neglect the Levites living in your towns, for they have no allotment or inheritance of their own.

At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, so that the Levites who have no allotment or inheritance of their own, and the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows, who live in your towns,

may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the works of your hands. Isn't that amazing? The passage doesn't stop with private celebration.

God says, don't neglect the Levites living in your towns, so that the Levites and the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied. This makes me proud of the God that we worship. Doesn't it?

He's amazing. He's like, I want you to have a seat at your table for the foreigner, for the widow, for the orphan, for the Levine. When you're celebrating my goodness, make sure that they are welcome at the table too.

Biblical blessing, it would seem, is communal. It includes worship, but it also includes justice. Amen.

It includes joy, but also generosity. It includes celebration, but also care for the vulnerable, which I think beautifully ties back to Genesis 12. I will bless you and all peoples on earth we blessed through you.

It's the idea of the conjude. If our blessing makes our table bigger, we are beginning to understand the heart of God. It's what it is to be a river and not a reservoir.

Our vision at this church is to be a faithful and fruitful church, loving God, loving others, and making disciples. And a really clear way to think about that is, we want to have room at the table for the new person, the underdog, the outsider.

It's amazing to consider how exclusive Christianity is. When you think about a table, Jesus is at the table and he says, I'm just right up front. This is the only table that will bring you to God.

You can't get to God any other way. I am the way, the truth and the life. It is absolutely and completely exclusive.

No other way to God. But it's also what is the most inclusive way to understand truth in the universe. It's exclusively through Jesus, but there's always a seat at the table for the new person.

Amen? So that's how hard that when we give to the health of this church as we're raising money in this May Mission Month offering, it's that we would be a church that is profoundly inclusive for everyone to come and find hope in the grace of God.

Open hands, remember God's provision. Open hands, not clench fists on the blessing of God. Enter the joy of the Lord.

Open hands, make room for others. And open hands overflow by the Spirit. In Deuteronomy, the blessing that comes from God is returned in worship, enjoyed in his presence and shared with others.

In Second Corinthians, we have that great passage that Gary read for us, where Paul takes the Deuteronomy language and turns it into gospel language.

He says, remember this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

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

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. As it is written, they have freely scattered their gifts to the poor, their righteousness endures forever.

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion.

And through us, your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. Paul is talking to the Corinthians about an offering they had promised. And he's basically saying, come on, I'm coming to pick it up to take it back to Jerusalem.

There's a famine and I'm hoping that you'll come through with it. Because God loves a cheerful giver, not a reluctant giver. God is able to bless you abundantly.

You'll be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion. Your generosity will result in being paid forward. Others will give thanks to God because of your generosity.

And that's the cycle of blessing. God supplies grace. God's people give generously.

Others are blessed. Thanksgiving rises to God. This is what it is to be blessed, that we might be a blessing.

Well, today is of course, Pentecost Sunday.

We've mentioned it before. And Pentecost, if there's anything that Pentecost is, it's a day of joy, isn't it? It is a day of fulfillment.

It was always a celebration back, even at the time of the Ten Commandments, they used to celebrate the idea of Pentecost, of a first fruits of God's blessing. And so here, it's not just a harvest festival of God's practical provision.

The first Pentecost was the celebration of the giving of the Holy Spirit, the gift of the Father. Acts chapter 2 is one of the more wonderful portions of scripture.

And Ben had the idea of getting some people from our congregation to read it out in their mother tongue. And this is just fantastic. So please enjoy Acts 2 in the languages of the nations.

Yeah, there should be a massive celebration like someone has just scored a goal at a World Cup final, because that's the end of the story. That's what the blessing to Abraham was all about, wasn't it?

I'm gonna bless you, narrow funnel of the hourglass, that you might be a blessing to the nations because of what Jesus has done, because Jesus had open hands and went to a cross and had those hands nailed to that wood and gave his perfect life and

shed his perfect blood. The nations can know God, hallelujah. This is what Pentecost is all about. And when Pentecost landed and the Spirit filled the church, Acts 2 is this beautiful picture of what the church looks like.

And I've got it just as a quick summary, there's devotion to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayer, shared possessions, generosity, gladness and seaharts, praise, favour, mission.

It's all wrapped up this series in this incredible verse, Galatians chapter three. Is it there, Galatians 3, 14?

He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. That's what this series is all about.

God's dream that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the nations, not just to the Jews, but to the nations, to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

The blessed life lives with open hands, open tables and open hearts. I hope you are inspired as we come towards the end of May Mission Month. We are part of a thousand blessed generations.

That's what God said. My heart is to bless to the thousandth generation. And this church has been around for a few of those generations.

And we believe it's time for this iteration of those generations to give generously that we might support the future work of a healthy expression of NorthernLife Baptist Church.

Doing work that's exciting around the world and work that's somewhat mundane. The work of the local church is a long game for the glory of God. And I think healthy churches know that every now and then, you have to invest in the normal.

And so thank you so much for those who have prayed through it and considered giving. I understand the pledges in our offering are around 33,000, and the giving is about 17,000 so far.

So we're receiving those pledges up until the first Sunday in June. So please consider how you could be part of it. I wonder if you'd like to stand, and I'd love to pray blessing over us as a church as we finish our series in mission.

And I think the band are going to come up and lead us in worship. In the name of Jesus, may you know the joy of open hands. In the name of Jesus, may you remember that every good gift comes from the Lord.

May you rejoice in his presence with gratitude, freedom and delight. May your table grow longer, your heart grow wider, and your life become a conduit of blessing. May you dance with reckless abandon and a joy unspeakable at the thought of God renewing all things by his powerful grace. May the Holy Spirit fill you afresh, so that the blessing of God may flow through you to the world God loves. In the name of Jesus, our Redeemer, and our joy. Amen.