

With Open Hands

By Doug Irving & Gary Randolph



Theme and Purpose

This play is named in honor of the book with the same title by Henri Nouwen.

Nouwen said that we can approach life either with clenched fists or with open hands. If we hold on too tightly to what we think we want, then our hands are not open to receive from God what we really need. As the magi interrupted their lives to follow a different path, in this play the Holy Spirit steers Darryl (and Randy we hope) onto a different path. In Scene 3 Teri points out that God offers forgiveness before we repent. Paul put it this way, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." We see God's unconditional love on the cross and also in the manger. But do we see it in the church and in our families? This play is a modern parable of a prodigal son and his father, who needs to come to terms with the son he has lost and the son he can now have.

Cast list

Darryl – mid-40s to mid-50s
Kate (Mary) – Darryl's wife
Randy – Darryl and Kate's estranged son, early to mid-20s
Emily – Darryl and Kate's daughter, about 15 years old
Bob – wise man
Teri – wise man (Bob's wife) or could be a man named Terry
Non-speaking parts: Joseph, Shepherds

Approximate Running Time

Scene 1: 5 minutes
Scene 2: 4 minutes
Scene 3: 5 minutes
Scene 4: 6 minutes
Scene 5 (optional): 2 minutes

Scene Description

Scene 1 & 2: Darryl and Kate's living room, set with couch, chair, and a partially decorated Christmas tree.
Scene 3: The live Nativity's "green room" at the church, set with table, folding chairs, coffee maker, etc.
Scene 4: The live Nativity scene
Scene 5: Bare stage

Prop List	<p>Scene 1: Christmas tree ornaments, stockings</p> <p>Scene 2: Newspaper or book</p> <p>Scene 3: Coffee cups, large gold foil wrapped candy bar (gold), aftershave bottle (frankincense), small jewelry box (myrrh)</p> <p>Scene 4: Above wise men gifts</p> <p>Scene 5: None</p>
Other Production Notes	<p>This play is a Christmas program kit. Just add choir songs, special music, or recitations before and after the scenes and you have a Christmas program.</p> <p>With three separate sets, you may have to be imaginative in set placement. You might set the living room on stage left, the room at the church on stage right, and the Nativity scene up stage center. Or stage hands could strike the living room and replace it with the room at the church between scenes 2 & 3 provided that it wasn't disruptive to whatever else was going on right then.</p>
Related Scriptures	<p>Luke 15:11-32; Matthew 2:1-12; Romans 5:8</p>
Song Suggestions	<p>Almost any Christmas songs can be used. To reinforce the theme of the play, we especially like: All Is Well (Michael W. Smith), Follow the Light, Grown-Up Christmas List</p>

Scene 1

Darryl, Kate, and Emily are in their living room, decorating a Christmas tree.

Emily:

So, Mom, you're going to play Mary in the live Nativity scene? I thought Mary was supposed to be more my age - you know, young?

Darryl:

You're mother still looks like a teenager to me.

Kate: *(a little huffy)*

That's sweet, Darryl. But you really should wear your reading glasses more. For some reason, Emily, they're using all adults this year in the Nativity scene - no youth.

Darryl:

Not even for the shepherds? It won't be the same. We always have these 4-foot-tall shepherds. It's like Mary and the seven dwarfs.

Emily:

You're funny, Daddy.

Darryl: *(suspiciously)*

So who's playing Joseph, Kate.

Kate:

Dirk DeMarco.

Darryl:

What? Isn't he the guy you said was really good looking?

Kate: *(furtively)*

Oh, I don't know. I haven't noticed.

Emily:

He has a Porsche, Mom! A convertible!

Darryl:

I'm pretty sure he has a lazy eye.

Kate:

No, he doesn't.

Darryl:

How can they cast a carpenter with a lazy eye? I'd like to see his work... (laugh) And so would he.

Darryl and Emily laugh while Kate shakes her head.

Darryl: (on a roll)

Ah, Christmas. You know, Emily, I remember Christmas as a little boy. There was this one year when it was really cold and one of the kids at school got his tongue stuck to the flagpole.

Emily:

Really?

Darryl:

Yes, that was the year I wanted a Red Rider BB Gun. My mom said I'd shoot my eye out.

Emily:

Daddy! That's not your life. That's a movie.

Darryl:

Huh? Oh. Well, have I told you about the time I went sledding and fell through the ice, and years later I met an angel named Clarence.

Emily:

Dad, you're losing it.

Kate:

That happened some time ago, dear.

Emily:

Okay, here's a real story - speaking of sledding. Remember the Christmas we all went sledding together at Grandpa's farm? That big hill wound down from the barn into the creek bed. I remember zooming past the cows. You were sledding, too, weren't you, Mom?

Kate:

You bet. I went sledding on that hill my whole childhood.

Darryl:

We all went sledding that year.

Emily:

Randy and I were sledding together. I was in front... but I couldn't steer very well. We were heading right for a big tree. I started screaming... and Randy pulled us off the sled just before we slammed into it.

Kate:

Thank God you both were fine.

Darryl:

The sled never was the same after that, though. I should work on that. Do you want to go sledding this winter?

Emily:

Will Randy be here?

Kate:

I doubt it. Last I heard he was in Grand Rapids.

Darryl: (snort)

Does he have a job?

Kate:

Best Buy or something.

Emily:

Will he be here for Christmas?

Darryl and Kate exchange glances.

Darryl:

I don't know if Randy does Christmas any more.

Emily:

But he's my brother. Family's supposed to be together for Christmas.

Kate:

Things get complicated sometimes.

Emily:

You guys just think Randy's going to corrupt me or something.

Darryl turns away and picks up another ornament. Awkward pause.

Kate:

Hey, you know what this tree needs? Popcorn strings!

Darryl:

That's a good idea. Want to help me make some, Emily?

Emily:

Sure. I guess.

Darryl and Emily begin to exit.

Emily:

Way to change the subject.

Darryl and Emily exit.

Kate continues to decorate by herself. She pulls out stockings one at a time and hangs them on a mantle or bookcase. She picks up a fourth stocking and looks at it for several beats. She starts to put it back in the box, but stops and walks off in the opposite direction from Darryl and Emily.

Fade to black

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Scene 2

Darryl sits in a chair in his living room reading the newspaper or a book. The doorbell rings. He rises to answer it. Door could be offstage or onstage.

Bob:

Hey, Darryl. I'm glad I caught you at home.

Darryl:

Bob! Merry Christmas almost. Come in. Come in.

Darryl and Bob move to the living room furniture but don't sit down.

Bob:

I'm here to offer you a great opportunity.

Darryl: *(suspiciously)*

This isn't one of those pyramid schemes, is it?

Bob:

No, but it does involve a turban.

Darryl:

What?

Bob:

Got your attention, didn't I? Hey, you know how the church is doing that live Nativity scene? I'm in charge of recruiting wise men. What do you say? You, me, and Teri.

Darryl: *(if using Terry, a man, remove words "your wife" and change "she" to "he")*

Teri, your wife? As a wise MAN? Well, she is wiser than you.

Bob:

So do you want to take the part or just stand here all night abusing me?

Darryl:

Hmmm. That's a tough choice.

Bob:

Alright! I'm out of here. Merry Christmas.

Darryl:

Okay. Okay. What would be involved?

Bob:

You know. Dress up in the church's wise men costumes. March out at the right time. Kneel before the manger for a few minutes. Then repeat it all evening at 20 and 50 past the hour.

Darryl:

Just like Headline News. But Kate is going to play Mary. Why can't I be Joseph?

Bob: (*puts hand on Darryl's shoulder*)

You're not the Joseph type, buddy. He was a carpenter. And everybody still remembers you at that work day.

Darryl:

That wasn't really my fault. I had a defective hammer. Say, how's the pastor doing in (*opening and closing his arm*) regaining his range of motion?

Bob: (*curtly*)

He'll be fine. And you'll be a wise man.

Darryl:

Well, I suppose I could. Sounds kinda fun.

Bob:

Great! We'll have a rehearsal on Saturday at 2:00. Then be at the church Sunday night around 5:00.

Darryl:

Okay. I'll see you there.

Bob:

Oh, one other thing. You gotta supply your own wise man gift to lay at the manger.

Darryl:

What should that be?

Bob:

Well, let's see. According to the cast list, you're the second wise man, Melchior. So you bring the second gift - (*counting on his fingers*) gold, frankincense, and myrrh. You bring frankincense.

Darryl:

Gee, Bob, I think we're all out of frankincense.

Bob:

You, too, huh? I think we've been out of frankincense since... uh... forever. So just grab an old bottle of perfume or something.

Darryl:

You know, Bob, I've always wondered - why do we always have three wise men?

Bob:

I don't know. It says there were three gifts. I suppose three gifts, three wise men.

Darryl:

Yeah, but the Bible doesn't say there were three. What if... What if there was a fourth?

Bob:

A fourth wise man, huh? What would his name have been?

Darryl:

Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar,... and.. uh...

Bob:

Onstar.

Darryl:

Ooh, that's good. He was in charge of directions. (*they both laugh*) Okay, so what if Onstar didn't bring a gift? He didn't get that memo.

Bob:

Yeah! And he got most of the way to Bethlehem before he realized the other three had brought gifts. So now he's looking for an open shopping mall or a Walgreens even, but, you know, it's Christmas for crying out loud, and nothing's open.

Darryl:

So he has to give something stupid like a camel blanket. And that's just so pathetic that when Matthew writes the gospel he doesn't even mention it.

Bob:

Yeah. (*laughter fades*) Well, this production just calls for three wise men. Better stick with the frankincense, Bub. Don't show up with a thing of chap stick from Walgreens.

Darryl:

I'll dig something up.

Bob:

See you Saturday.

Fade to black

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Scene 3

In a room at the church Darryl, Bob, and Teri are sitting in folding chairs around a folding table in wise men costumes. They are drinking coffee and talking. Shepherd could be milling around, though they need to exit early to take their places in the Nativity scene.

Darryl:

So, you see, Teri, he got to Bethlehem and didn't have a gift. He's looking all over the town for something, but all the stores are closed.

Bob:

Cause it was Christmas. Get it?

Teri:

But it wasn't Christmas. (pause) It was Christmas Eve.

Bob:

Actually, it was like a year later. But you're missing the point here, Teri.

Teri:

So what was this fourth wise man's name?

Bob:

Okay. This is good: Onstar.

Teri: (shakes her head)

You guys are so stupid.

Darryl:

Maybe we should stick to knock-knock jokes.

Teri:

Maybe you should.

Bob:

So, you all brought your props? I have this candy bar with a gold wrapping. I'm thinking it will come in handy if I get hungry.

Darryl:

Don't eat your gold, Bob.

Bob:

It's a magi gift and it's a snack food!

Teri:

I dug out this little purse for myrrh. I always liked this purse. Don't you think this is darling?

Bob:

Oh, yes, hon, it's divine.

Darryl:

I had to look high and low to find something that might look like frankincense. All the perfume bottles had logos printed on them. But I was rummaging through the cupboard and I found this old bottle of aftershave way in the back behind some cleaning stuff. I had to dust it off, but I think it looks pretty good.

Bob:

Yeah! That's frankincense! *(takes the bottle)* Let's get a sniff of this baby. *(unscrews the cap and wafts it over the trio.)*

Teri:

Well, you didn't get that at Walgreens. They sell better stuff than that.

Bob and Teri laugh. Darryl gets quiet.

Darryl:

Now I remember this stuff. I gave this to Randy for Christmas when he was in the eighth grade. You should have seen his face. It was like a rite of passage for him to get aftershave from his old man. You know, I remember the next day he shaved and wore it - plus about a dozen little pieces of toilet paper from where he cut himself. *(pause)* Wow. I'd forgotten all about that.

Teri:

Oh, I remember how cute he was at that age, especially in his Boy Scout uniform.

Darryl:

Yeah. Good memories. *(stands up)* And here's one more thing that has passed into memory. Man, I loved the kid that Randy was at 14 - or 8 - or 4.

Teri:

When was the last time you talked to him?

Darryl:

I don't know. I don't want to talk to him the way he is now.

Teri:

Will he be coming home for Christmas?

Darryl:

No! Emily was angling for it. But I don't want him in the house around Emily as long as he's living the way he is.

Bob:

Keep praying, man. Prodigals do come home.

Darryl:

I know. I keep praying.

Bob moves to the door to watch for their cue.

Teri:

Darryl, I may be out of line here, but we go back a long way, and if you want Randy to come home like the Prodigal Son, maybe you ought to be more like the Prodigal's father.

Darryl:

What's that supposed to mean?

Teri:

If Randy showed up here tonight, what would you do? Would you wrap him in your arms, or would you make him jump through hoops asking for forgiveness?

Darryl:

I'm not making him jump through hoops. But I want him to know that he needs to turn his life around. You can't offer forgiveness until someone repents.

Teri:

God does. Isn't that what Christmas is?

Bob:

Guys, I hate to break this up, but it's time to go on.

Darryl:

Yeah, but, Teri, you're kind of over-simplifying it. There are considerations here.

Teri: *(Teri gets up and follows Bob out the door, turning before she exits to say)*

You're the wise man.

Darryl starts to follow them. He returns to the table to pick up the aftershave bottle. He picks it up and looks at it.

Darryl:

So it turns out that this is the gift I have to give the Christ child. A golden moment covered in dust shoved in the back of the cupboard. I haven't thought about this in years. Well, it's only a cheap bottle of aftershave.

Darryl exits.

Fade to black

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Scene 4

Mary (Kate), Joseph, and Baby Jesus are in live nativity surrounded by a couple of shepherds. Darryl, Bob, and Teri enter and approach manger with Darryl nearest audience. Bob and Teri kneel, while Darryl remains standing.

After a few moments, Bob and Teri lay their gifts in front of the manger. Darryl hesitates. He stares at the bottle of aftershave and shakes his head. After a few moments he drops to his knees and prays silently. He holds the aftershave out toward the manger but doesn't set it down.

Kate: (in stage whisper)

Darryl! Set down your gift. (pause) Darryl, we need to finish the scene and clear the set for the next performance.

Darryl: (in stage whisper)

But Kate, do you know what this is?

Kate:

Yes! THIS is what's embarrassing me. Set down your gift.

Darryl hesitates.

Kate:

This is not difficult, Darryl. Just open your hands and let it go.

Darryl hesitates.

Darryl:

Open my hands.

Kate:

Right. Just open your hands and let it go. I'll buy you some more aftershave. You don't even use that stuff.

Darryl looks up at her in surprise.

Darryl:

But this can't be replaced.

Kate:

I'll replace it with something better. Darryl, you can't hold onto that forever.

Darryl hesitates.

Kate: *(exasperated through clenched teeth)*

Darryl, lay down your gift before the Christ child!

Slowly he places the bottle in front of the manger.

If there is a choir, they could sing a number then.

Shepherds leave the nativity. After they leave, the wise men rise and leave, crossing to the other side of the stage. Darryl leaves reluctantly, with an eye on the bottle of aftershave.

As the wise men reach the other side of the stage, Darryl spots Randy on the front row of the audience. Darryl stops in his tracks. He rushes over to Randy as Mary and Joseph exit. Darryl pulls Randy out of his seat and hugs him. Randy pulls back in surprise.

Randy:

Hi, Dad. Hey, aren't you supposed to be in character?

Darryl:

I'll get back in character in a minute. But I had to come see you, Randy. I'm... I'm glad you came.

Randy:

You are? That's something new. What was going on over there? Was the Virgin Mary yelling at you?

Darryl: *(smiling)*

Yeah. You don't see that every day, do you? So... what brings you here? I thought you were in Grand Rapids?

Randy:

I was. But... I don't know... I was outside on break at work...

Darryl:

Smoking? *(Randy shoots him a look of exasperation.)* Sorry.

Randy: *(after a cleansing sigh)*

The winter evening was just setting in and I saw this really bright star in the sky. It just reminded me so much of when I was a kid. I'd be riding in the back seat of the car to church Christmas programs and looking up at all the stars in the clear winter sky. Next thing I knew I was on the Interstate.

Darryl:

You found a star just when I found that aftershave.

Randy:

What aftershave?

Darryl:

It isn't so important now. I just gave it away. The point is it's a... well, call it a coincidence - a great coincidence. So are you staying a few days?

Randy: *(gestures a lack of commitment)*

Maybe. I've checked in at the motel.

Darryl:

Your old room has a vacancy.

Randy:

I don't know if I'm ready for your house rules, Dad.

Darryl:

We can talk about it.

Randy:

Frankly, that's more than I thought we'd do.

Darryl:

Well, my hands are open.

Teri rushes in.

Teri: *(panicked)*

Darryl! *(switches to a nice welcoming voice)*. Oh, hi, Randy. *(hugs Randy)* It's so good to see you. *(gives Darryl a knowing look)* When did you get in? Are you staying for Christmas?

Randy:

Well, uh, I... I just might.

Darryl:

We were just talking about that. But, Teri, a second ago you looked like there was some kind of crisis.

Teri: (*fuming*)

Oohhh. That idiot Bob was hungry and ate all his gold. Now he's not feeling so well.

Randy:

He ate his what?

Teri:

We need a third wise man for the last show.

Darryl:

Randy?

Randy:

Hey, I'm no wise man.

Teri:

Apparently Bob isn't either. Please, Randy. We really need you.

Darryl: (*touches Randy on the shoulder*)

Yeah. We do.

Randy:

Well... OK. Why not? I guess I did follow a star here.

Randy and Darryl exit together.

Fade to black

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Scene 5 (optional)

Randy comes on stage alone dressed in Bob's wise man costume and delivers the "You, Too, Are Magi" reading:

READER:

You, too, are magi.

You, too, saw a star,

A light in the darkness of your life,

A star of wonder and hope,

A star that called to your heart, "At last, this is it.
This is what you've been searching for, what you've been
waiting for."

Maybe it came to you in a song or with the touch of
someone's hand,

A realization of someone praying for you year after year.

Whatever it was, this star shone.

It wouldn't leave you alone, and you couldn't leave it.

So putting feet to that wisdom, you followed the star,

Until it brought you to the Christ child.

There you saw the face of love.

Your eyes were opened,

Your ears unstopped to the music around you,

Your tongue was loosed to sing,

Your feet unshackled to dance with joy.

You responded - how could you not? - by giving in kind.

Not just gold and frankincense, but everything you had.

Though everything you had to give had come from Him,

And was dirty and broken with misuse.
Still you gave and you gave.
Though sometimes it hurt.
Though some of it you wanted to keep.
Though some of it you didn't want to bring out in the open.
But once you started giving, you just couldn't stop.
And he wouldn't let you stop.
And having been warned in a dream not to go back,
You arose and took a different path.
But where would you go?
And how would you live now that you had given everything
away?
Difficult questions, even for magi.

Fade to black

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