

“Hold On Tight and Don’t Let Go”

Joshua 23: 1-16

1 After a long time had passed and the Lord had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then old and well advanced in years, 2 summoned all Israel—their elders, leaders, judges, and officials – and said to them: “I am old and well advanced in years. 3 You yourselves have seen everything the Lord your god has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the Lord your god who fought for you. 4 Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain—the nations I conquered—between the Jordan and the Great Sea in the west. 5 The Lord your God himself will drive them out of the way. He will push them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the Lord your God promised you.

6 Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. 7 Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. 8 But you are to hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have until now.

9 The Lord has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. 10 One of you routs a thousand, because the Lord your God fights for you, just as He promised. 11 So be very careful to love the Lord your God.

12 But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, 13 then you may be sure that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your back and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from the good land, which the Lord your God has given you.

14 Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed. 15 But just as every good promise of the Lord your God has come true, so the Lord will bring on you all the evil he has threatened, until He has destroyed you from this good land He has given you. 16 If you violate the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the Lord’s anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land He has given you. (NIV)

When I was in Middle School which is like Junior High in most places but includes 5th grade in Wisconsin, some of my friends and I would play a bad game or trick on one another. We would sneak up behind someone and when they weren’t looking we would try to knock the books out of their hands. You see backpacks weren’t carried all over school back then. I especially remember one time when I was getting back at a guy named Russell. He got so mad that he started swinging. We both ended up

at the Principal's office for fighting. It was embarrassing. Anyway the point I'm trying desperately to make is that if one of us relaxed it was easy to knock the books out of the other's hands. When we paid attention and held on tight it wouldn't work and we could laugh at the attempt. But when we weren't paying attention our books would end up all over the floor.

As I read through this passage I believe that one of Joshua's main points here is that we need to hold on to our Lord and His Word tightly and pay attention to them or our faith will get knocked loose! Our test for today is an account of Joshua's last words to the Israelites. He has been their leader through thick and thin. He is getting old, in fact the next chapter indicates that he is over 100 years old and knows that His time to pass on to heaven is coming soon. Therefore, we know that what Joshua says, is filled with what He things are the most important things for the Israelites to remember, to think about , and/or to do. We tend to listen closely to people at the end of their lives because they know that their words won't have a chance to be repeated. So we have right here in Joshua 23, the things that Joshua has learned should be the priority of the people. His final words can be condensed into one main sentence. "the Lord your God is He who has fought your battles ... You must hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have done to this day." **[NOTE 1]** Joshua wanted to impress upon the Israelites the importance of remaining faithful in the face of so many pressures to be unfaithful. One of the ways that we hold onto the Lord is to hold onto His Word. In verse 6 Joshua tells the Israelites that they must be very courageous, exceedingly strong and steadfast. He immediately follows that with the how to... By holding on to the Word of God. Other versions have it "Keep and Do the Word", "Observe and Do the Word," or "Obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses. Joshua's words to us today would be, Hold fast to God's Word! Hold on tight and don't let go.

Now if you were to actually carry God's Word with you wherever you went you would have to hold on to it. If you just kind of cradled it in your hand or your arm it would be easy for somebody to knock it away from you. And I guarantee that the evil one wants to knock it away from you!! If you tried to hold on to it with only one finger it would be pretty easy to get the Word knocked loose. Consider that everyone of your fingers and your thumb are ways to hold on to the Word of God. Now you can hold up the bible with one finger but I would say that the hold is precarious at best using only your pinkie finger. **[NOTE 2]** Trying to hold on to the bible with just your pinkie is the same as trying to hold on to your faith or the Word of God by only reading the Word. I want you to take note that the number one way to hold on to the Word of God is to read it. Some of us can't even do that with any consistency. For those of us just reading the Bible occasionally, it is easy to knock the Bible out of our grasp. **[NOTE 3]**

Now let say we add the ring finger. The Pinky is reading the Word. The Ring finger is Hear the Word. You hear it read and you hear it preached on. Now your grip is a little stronger. It takes a little more force to knock the Bible from your grasp if you also Hear the Word. **[NOTE 4]** Now let's say you add the middle finger. The Middle finger is like adding Study the Word to your grip. Now your grip is getting

stronger. So if we make time to study the Word, read the Word, and hear the Word we will have a decent grip on our faith, on the Word!

[NOTE 5] Now let's suppose we also spend time memorizing the Word. Now we have all four fingers and our grip is strong. We have all four fingers holding the Bible against our palm. Why? Because we need to be memorizing the Word to have a good hold on God's word! I don't want to hear whining that you can't memorize scripture. Unless you have a serious case of short term memory loss and dementia, you can memorize the Word. For three months take four sticky notes or tape four pieces of tape on your mirror with Bible verses on them. Every morning and every night you read all four Bible verses. Pretty soon you won't even have to look. So make an effort! Try it before you knock it! **[NOTE 6]**

If you start bouncing around or get shaken your group can loosen. With a decent enough downward blow somebody could still pull the Bible and your faith out of your grip! But if you add the thumb, which is Meditation! You can really hold on tight with pressure from both sides, your thumb and all four fingers. No matter how you get jostled you can hold on to it. The thumb represents meditation. It sounds like something that a Buddhist Priest or Catholic Monk would do. No, it really just means thinking about God's Word so you could even call it Applying the Word. It has to be on your mind, you have to think about it for you to apply it right? If Scripture is on your mind more than once a week and you are reading the Word, hearing the Word, Studying the Word, and attempting to Memorize the Word ... Then you will have an excellent grip on your Faith and the Word of God. You will not be tempted to drift to the left or the right but stay on target!

The world will and does promise power, it promises pleasure, and it promises success. But all of these are bubbles that burst on contact. Why do you think so many "successful" people are miserable? It's because the bubbles burst and the promises are empty. They don't satisfy. They don't satisfy because what we really need, what we really want, is to fill that God-shaped vacuum or space that's built into each of our lives when we are created. Guess What? It is God-shaped for a reason! Nothing else will fill the space without leaving gaps. Some things will leave bigger gaps than others. If you want true success, then you want Jesus Christ. To fill that God-shaped space we need to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. How do we do that? You simply pray, you confess your sins, you ask Jesus to forgive your sins, you thank Him for loving you unconditionally and you vow to live Jesus' way! You receive Him as Lord and Savior. Lord means He's in control. Savior means that you accept that you are helpless on your own, but you are saved only by the blood of Jesus shed on the cross, a sacrifice to pay for your sins.

[NOTE 7] Joshua basically tells the Israelites that their priorities are mixed up. They should have God first! In our case it is Jesus first! Then of second importance is our spouse, third is our children, and fourth is the Church and your job! It is so easy to get these priorities scrambled. Too often work causes us to neglect our children, our spouse, and our relationship with God. That is not good! There are so many ways to put

things ahead of our personal relationship with Jesus Christ! BUT DON'T DO IT!! I only had three devotions last week. I let my sermon prep, my work, mess with my priorities. I didn't use all four fingers and my thumb to hold on to the world. "Joshua says to you and me this morning, "Hold fast to the Lord your God! Choose Jesus!

The only trouble with that is that it takes time! Some people don't like this idea of living one day at a time. It's frustrating to grow slowly toward wholeness in Christ. God's Success is slow, it takes time. It is a slow, sometimes excruciating process to become Christ-like! With advertising yelling Hot and Now, Have it Your Way, Right Away, Instant Success, we want quick easy answers. We want a life free of problems and instant success. I'm sorry to say that, ...that is not what God is offering. We have a few days, weeks, or months of faithfulness and we want rewards NOW! "I want patience and I want it NOW!" A relationship with the Lord requires a lifetime of faithfulness. This isn't something we do today and forget tomorrow. It is a daily battle. We can't do it on our own. But Jesus promised, if we let Him, He will carry us through the valleys. Make Jesus the Lord of your life and He will carry you through! Hold on tight to the Word of God by reading it, hearing it, studying it, memorizing it, and meditating on it and applying it. O Lord teach us Your ways and help us to trust and obey!

Trying to live the Christian life, live Jesus' way, without a good hold on the Word is like being the starting running back for the Lions, Jahmyr Gibbs and not being able to hold on to the football! If Gibbs or Montgomery couldn't hold on to the ball, if defenders could easily knock the ball out of their hands, they would get benched fast, real quick with Dan Campbell as coach. In other words they would take them out of the game. If you don't have a good hold on to the Word of God then you will be taken out of the game! Don't let anybody come along or come up behind you and with one quick blow, knock away your faith! If we neglect any of the four fingers or thumb of holding on to the Word then our grip will be weakened! How is your grip? If you let go, the Word AND your faith will fall away!

Pay attention to your book, God's Book, the Bible! Our Mission Statement says we seek to become Disciple-makers in the power of the Holy Spirit, by standing on the Word, walking in love, and resting in the arms of Jesus. As your children and friends grow teach them to hold on to God's Word. Show them by example. Hold on Tight ...and Don't Let Go! Let's pray ... AMEN

Sermon Notes for “Hold On Tight and Don’t Let Go” based on Joshua 23:1-16
Given at Doster Community Church on May 18, 2025

- I. These are Joshua’s final words to the Israelites. He is over 100 years old. “The Lord your God is He who fought your battles ...you must hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have done to this day.” Hold fast to the Word!
- II. Holding on the Word with just your pinky is like trying to hold on to your faith by just reading the Word. And just think, some of us are not even reading the Word! We are easy picking for the evil one.
- III. The pinky and ring finger are a little stronger together. That stands for reading the Word and hearing the Word. So if we go to church every Sunday and Read the Bible most days then we have a little better chance of holding on to the Word/our faith.
- IV. Add the middle finger to the pinky and ring finger and the grip is starting to get pretty solid, but still, it is fairly easy to have it knocked away. The middle finger is represented by Study. Read the Word daily, hear the Word (preached), and Study the Word!
- V. Now add the pointer finger (number 1) which is represented by memorizing the Word. I guarantee that everyone can do it. Make the attempt but a serious downward blow can still dislodge the Bible from our grip.
- VI. Add your thumb, and you have as good a grip as possible. Exercise it and your grip gets stronger. The thumb is represented by meditation. Think about it and consider it! Spend time applying and responding to it!
- VII. Get your priorities straight. God first, Spouse second, children third, then your church and job. Trying to live the Christian life without a good hold on the Bible is no good. What are you going to do to strengthen your grip? Write down at least one thing that you will do this week!