

# Drawing Near-2nd Session

by Gisela Yohannan

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*To hold fast to our confession of hope, we must learn to trust in God's promises, renew our mind with the Word of God, and transform our lives to be like Christ.*

**Duration:** 1:13:44

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 31:3, Malachi 3:6, Luke 9:23, Romans 4:20, Colossians 3:2, Hebrews 10:22-23, Hebrews 11:6, Hebrews 13:8, Revelation 2:10

**Topics:** "Experiencing God", "Faithfulness", "Holding Fast to God's Promises"

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## Description

Gisela Yohannan emphasizes the importance of drawing near to God and holding fast to our faith amidst a rapidly changing world. She highlights that while everything around us is transient, God's promises and His nature remain constant and unchanging. By using biblical examples, she encourages believers to cling to their hope in Christ, demonstrating unwavering faith and patience, just as figures like Abraham and Jesus did. Yohannan reminds us that our commitment to God should be lifelong, urging us to practice holding fast to His promises through life's challenges. Ultimately, she calls for a transformation of our minds through God's Word to strengthen our resolve in faith.

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## Transcript

Yesterday evening, when we were kind of tired, we talked about the first part of our scripture, let us draw near with a sincere heart. So today we will continue with this verse. Actually, there are three sections.

Whoever wrote the letter to the Hebrews wrote also, let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. We not only supposed to draw near, but we also supposed to hold fast the confession of our hope without shaking or wavering or hesitating or without walking off. Some of you guessed where I came from because of my accent.

Even after many years, you still can detect it very well. I come from a small place in Germany. I was born and raised in Germany and I came to the States when I was 24.

Now I'm 62 and still you can hear where I come from. But that's not what I really want to talk about. We want to talk about let us hold fast.

I come from a village that is about 800 years old. The houses that were built, they last several generations. Some of them are 100, 200 some years old or even more than that.

And the farms and the properties, they used to be passed down from one generation to another, same family in the house. And people know each other. People had really roots to go back to even when they go all over the world or whatever, they had roots to go back to.

But it all changed in the 20th century. After World War I and especially after World War II, things have changed forever. People no longer think deeply about having roots and go back to.

They rather sell their things and travel and live at different places. Actually, when we look at our world of the 21st century, we realize that things have changed continually, even in our lifetime, my lifetime. Of course, if you are only 20 years old, you can't talk about that so much, but it's so evident.

We are living in a different world today. What is in today is out tomorrow. Every spring, you can buy a new car.

It may be the same brand, but there will be a new model. It's more exciting to have the new one. Or with technology, you know, you buy the latest iPhone and a year later, they come out with a newer one, with a nicer one that has more features.

And people camp out in front of the store all night to get the newest and the latest. I don't know if you are doing that, but I have seen it on TV, you know. And for the kids that are growing up, a rotary phone that has these little holes to dial, it's something like an antique, you know.

And then, of course, our homes. Every year, we have new home trends. You can buy this magazine, and it tells you what all is new in building a home.

And you should, according to them, you would remodel your kitchen about every few years because it's outdated. Things are new, things are changing, and things are better. And you should redecorate your house at least once a year.

You know, there are new colors, and you are a year or two or three behind. And then look at the music. It's continually changing.

You can buy the greatest hits of the 60s, the 70s, the 80s, the 90s, 2000. And people know how old you are by what you are listening because things have changed, and you got stuck somewhere. And then what about dancing? I don't know if you all are, you know, going dancing, but, you know, things have evolved.

Every few years, dancing is a whole new experience for people. You know, they had these classical ballroom things, and then all of a sudden came the jitterbug, and the disco, and the hip-hop, and what are they doing, breakdancing, and what is now in... You hardly can keep up with it. I remember when I was in high school, the newest thing in dance was the twist.

And some of these young people don't even know what that is. And fashion, you know, every season, about four times a year, the fashion is changing. And they will make sure they have different colors every season so people can know that your sweater is two or three years old because you are no longer wearing the right color.

And the hairstyle, you know, today I see you with maybe blonde hair and long hair, and next retreat, if I ever see you again, you have short hair and dark, and things are continually changing. And people's lifestyles are also changing continually. I read a statistic that people move in our country here about 16

times over their lifetime.

Now, some statistics say 11.7 times, some say 14, and some say 16. 16 times we move. That means you get uprooted about 16 times.

And that is actually every five years. And one in six Americans is moving every year. One in six, so let's count how many of you are moving.

You know, it has to do, of course, with the economy. You know, people change jobs because there is some opportunity, some salary, some better living conditions somewhere else. And then, of course, the entertainment industry has to come up all the time with new, increasingly amazing things to keep us from being bored.

Actually, people get bored in our generation when nothing new is happening. You know, we walk around and we are almost gloomy. What I try to say is nothing is really permanent in our 21st century culture, not even marriage.

You know, people no longer know the value of depth and commitment. And since we are so much used to that ever-changing life, it is even hard for us, and even much harder for our children, to relate to something that is eternal, or that is set in concrete, you know, or that is permanent. And some of us don't even want it, because what do you do if nothing is changing? You know, it is strange.

But when it comes to God, we all of a sudden find God never changes. Everything about God and His Word is eternal. So now we have it.

We are continually looking for new things, and God is not changing, like we do. You know, He Himself never changes. Think about it.

Malachi 3.6 says, For I, the Lord, do not change. And then Hebrews 13.8, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, yes, and forever. And then His Word never changes.

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words will not pass away. Mark 13.31 His love never changes. Ours changes all the time.

But His doesn't. Jeremiah 31.3 I have loved you with an everlasting love. And then His love and faithfulness never changes.

Psalms 100 verse 5 says, For the Lord is good. His loving kindness is everlasting. And His faithfulness to all generations, everything that has to do with God, is eternal, not changing.

But also His requirements to follow Him never changes. We hope they do, but they don't. Jesus still says, If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Luke 9.23 And then His expectations of us as believers, as followers of Christ, they also never change. Not even in the 21st century, dear sisters, they are still the same. He expects that we make a lifetime commitment to Him.

Not a short-term trip. You know, when you look in the Bible, anyone God ever called to follow Him and to serve Him, it was always a lifetime calling. It was not a three-month commitment.

It was a lifetime calling. He expects us never to look back. That also hasn't changed.

No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. Luke 9.62 His expectations of living for Him and not for ourselves, or the world, has never changed. Colossians 3.2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

And then His expectation of us being faithful until death has not changed. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the ground of life. Revelation 2.10 Now, there we have it.

We are ever-changing in our 21st century culture. Our mindset, and there we deal with God who never changes, whose requirement never changes. So what do we do as Christians? Do we live our culture, or do we learn to live what God says and hold on to the confession of our faith, as holding on to the things that God said they are eternal? We read that we're supposed to hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.

Now, holding fast means you cling to and you don't let go. You never let go, like we said just a while ago. Have some of you ever seen that movie, The Gods Must Be Crazy? These Bushmen stories? There is a scene where this pilot is having to do an emergency landing with a small plane in the desert, and he's nowhere.

So he has to walk out from the desert to civilization, and while he's going through this wilderness, there is this badger, you know, this little animal, and that little animal bites his boot, and he tries to get rid of him, shaking him loose, and he's not letting go. So in the end, this pilot, in order to survive, he's walking through this desert place and through all these difficulties he has to face, this badger on his boot, and he's walking like this, dragging this badger all along. You know, that is holding fast, that little animal just sank his teeth in, and he didn't let go of this boot.

This is what God has in mind for us to hold fast. Just don't let go, don't let go, don't let go. And then without wavering, I don't pronounce that very well, but you can look up the word.

It starts with a W. It means to be resolute, to be undivided, to without hesitation. I don't know if you ever heard about Wilhelm Tell. He's the national hero in Switzerland.

You know, hundreds of years ago, he was one of these freedom fighters, and the mean king, he sentenced him that he need to shoot an apple with an arrow from his son's head. Maybe you heard that story. Now, the father don't want to really do that because this is his son, but the son, he trusts his father so completely.

He puts the apple, and he's standing there, and the arrow comes, and he's not wavering. He's not turning or running off or ducking, nothing. He's just totally standing still, trusting his father that the arrow will not hit his face, but that it will hit the apple.

And it did. He split the apple apart, and Switzerland is a free nation now. But that means not wavering, not moving.

Whatever comes towards us, we're supposed to stand still, trusting, holding on, not being shaken, not running off. So what is the confession of our hope we're supposed to hold on to? That is, of course, the return of Jesus Christ. He's coming back.

He hasn't come back so far, but we are so closer today than they were 2,000 years ago. And we need to hold on to this. He is coming back.

He will take us home. He promised it. And then also, the confession of our hope is that we hang on and cling to and holding fast whatever he promised in his word that he will do.

Hanging on, clinging to God's promises, and never let go. So how long do we have to hold on? How long? We're supposed to cling in faith to the promises even if we have to wait a long, long time. You remember Abraham? You know, he was all excited to leave his relatives and go to the promised land.

And God promised him a son when he was 75 years old. And I am sure Sarah and Abraham waited every year for this promised son to arrive. And nothing happened the first year, and the second year, and the third year, and the fourth year, the fifth year.

Abraham had to wait 25 years until he was 100. He had to hold on to this promise until his son was born. And we read about him in Romans 4 verse 20.

It talks about Abraham, yet with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God. He held on to the promise until the promise was fulfilled. Cling to it, never let go.

That is what Abraham showed us. That means we cannot let anyone shake us or stop us from holding fast. You know, our mind is telling us, forget about it.

The devil is telling us it will never happen what God promised there. You know, it won't happen for you, it may happen for someone else somewhere, but not for you. And then, of course, our enemies will say, there's no use you pray and believe on that.

It cannot happen. The situation is too far gone. And then our friends also will tell us, just move on.

Just let it go. Move on with your life. Yet what does God say? Cling to it like the little badger on the boot.

Don't move until God fulfills what he promised. Think about Joseph in Egypt. He had these dreams when he was 17 years old, and he believed these dreams was God's way of telling him what he's going to do with his life.

And then he's thrown in the well, he's sold as a slave to Egypt, he ends up in the dungeon, in prison for years. Now he's 30 years old. You know, he could have said to himself, forget these dreams.

They will never happen. Not in the situation I'm in. It's too impossible.

But he believed, and he held fast until he saw the fulfillment of what God had promised him. Now, why is it so important to God to tell us that we hold fast and not let go? Why is it so important to God that he put it here for us? The reason is because nothing in God's kingdom works apart from faith. Nothing in God's kingdom works apart from faith.

Salvation, you cannot be saved unless you put your trust in the Lord, until you believe. Blessings from God, answers to prayer, healing, deliverance, each of these things only come to us. The promises are only fulfilled if we have faith.

That's why it is so important to God that we don't let go of what he promised. Hebrews 11, 6 says, and without faith it is impossible to please him. Matthew 21, 22, and everything you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.

That means, unless you hold on in faith, you will not receive it. James 1, 6 and 7 talks about the one who doubts. And it says, therefore, let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord.

God's kingdom only works with faith. It's just like my car. It only runs on gas.

You got a car? Does it take anything than gas? Now they have this problem in New Jersey and New York with rations, you know, for gas. Well, can they fill in coffee and then they can go all over the state of New Jersey with coffee in the tank? Does it work? Or Pepsi? Maybe they have a bottle of liquid plumber. Fill in the tank.

It won't work. The same way, nothing in God's kingdom works apart from faith. That's why it is so important for God that we learn to hold fast and not let go of his promises.

You know, receiving anything from God has two requirements. Did you know that? Not just one. It has two requirements.

I will read it to you what they are. Hebrews 6.12 is telling us, Be imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. And Hebrews 6.15 talks about Abraham.

And thus, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. So what does it take to receive from God? First, it takes faith. Trusting that God will do what he promised in his word.

And the second thing is patience. It's waiting, holding on until God answers. If you want to receive from God, you need to have both.

You need to have patience and you need to hold on. Patience and faith. You know, sometimes we have faith but we don't have patience and we don't wait long enough.

And we say, God's word didn't work. Or we have patience and we wait but we don't have faith. We don't believe and then it doesn't work either.

What do we do? Both together at the same time. We need to have faith and patience. That means holding on.

If it is 25 years, if it is 30 years, if it is 40 years. Holding on until we see God's fulfillment. And then, why is it so important that we hold on and not let go? Because Jesus is faithful to keep his promise to us.

It says Hebrews 10.23 For he who promised is faithful. And 1 Thessalonians 5.24 Faithful is he who calls you and he also will bring it to pass. Now, what that means is Jesus already got the answer in his hand and he's faithful to give it to you.

But he can't give it to you unless you believe him and you hold on. You hold fast. You cling to his promises.

You know, sometimes God's timing is not our timing. And we may need to wait a year longer or a day longer or two days longer. We often give God our ultimatum we say, you know, I believe if you do this, you

know, you need to answer me you got one week.

And then I need to make plans for a second option. Is that holding on? No, it is not. God wants us to hold on until we see the fulfillment.

Now, that is rather a big change from our 20th century, 21st century hopping from one thing to another. We have not really learned very much how to hold on and how to cling to. So we need to be retrained.

You know that? We need to be retrained. So how do we learn to hold fast? We were saying in the beginning our background and our culture is not helping us. But God knows that.

When he adopts you as his child he knows that you come from maybe a very uncommitted, very fluent lifestyle. But he doesn't want you to stay that way. So he sets out to help you to learn some of these very, very important things.

And one of it is how to hold fast. You know, God's goal is to transform us, each one of us into the image of Christ. Romans 8, 29 says he knew us, he knew that you would be saved, that you would be his child.

And so he predestined us to become conformed to the image of his son. Now that means he wants us to take on the character of Christ. To become like him in every area of our life.

To love like him. To have compassion like him. To be obedient like him.

To be holy like him. To be humble like him. To be submissive, to be kind.

And also to be steadfast like the Lord Jesus. To be unmovable in our faith like the Lord Jesus. To make commitments and keep them like the Lord Jesus.

And holding fast to our confession of our hope without wavering, like the Lord Jesus. Now, how do we get from here to there? How do we learn to hold fast? How do we learn any other thing also? The first step is we need to renew our mind with the Word of God. We got the 21st century thinking in our mind.

But God wants us to be transformed in the image of Christ. So our transformation starts with renewing our mind. Why is God starting with our mind? Because our actions always follow our thinking.

The way we think, that's the way we will act. What we believe in our heart, that's what we will live. So God starts with our mind.

To renew our mind, He wants us to get a different set of thoughts. I want to read you Romans 12 too. And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

In Romans 8, 29, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son. When we get saved, we have to learn a complete new way of life. This is so, so important.

You know, the Bible tells us that Jesus delivered us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of light. That's just like coming from one strange, from one country to a strange new place where all the rules and regulations and way of life is the opposite. If you try to apply the regulations of your old place to the new one, nothing works right.

Just move to a different country like India or something. People do things so differently. You have to relearn how to cook.

You have to relearn how to clean your house. You have to relearn. That's the same thing.

When we come to God, we are coming to His kingdom. And now, our old way of life doesn't work anymore. You know, I don't know if you ever went to England.

Maybe some of you did. You know, here in the United States and most parts of the world, we drive on the right side of the road. Now, let's say you fly into England, you rent yourself a car at the airport, and then you head off the same way you drive here, on the road over there.

How far will you get? You know, you go down the highway and all of a sudden the traffic comes all toward you because you are at the wrong side of the road. That's the same way when we come to God's kingdom. If we have our old way of thinking, our old way of life, and we try to continue that, nothing will work.

We need first to renew our mind. We need to think differently. Then we can act differently.

Our problem is when we come into God's kingdom, our old computer program from our life we had before we came to him is still running in our head. Did you know that? All these things you always lived, maybe you got saved when you were 30 or 40. And the way you lived for 40 years, that program is living in your head.

And if you continue to do that, you will say this Christian life is not working. What do you need to do? You need to install a new computer program in your head, a new way of thinking. You know, our thinking about everything when we come to the Lord, that includes marriage, work, prayer, the way we talk, the way we relate to other people.

Including how we hold fast to anything. We need to change so all these things will line up with the thinking and the ways of God. Only then the biblical principles will work in your life.

And you will become increasingly more like the Lord Jesus. So many times people are frustrated and say this Christian life is not working. If that someone is you, you need to check what's in your mind.

If the old computer program is running or if you have installed a new one. Sometimes we install a new one in one area. Maybe we learned how to pray, you know, like the Bible says.

But we never learned, changed our way of speaking. We still speak the same way. Or, maybe we learned how to love someone.

How to serve someone. But we never renewed our mind about our marriage or raising children. And the things don't work.

Every time something doesn't work, check your computer program in your head and see if your thinking and God's thinking are lined up. Because your actions will go according to what you think in your mind. Of course, what should we do to renew our mind with? So, we will be transformed in the image of Christ.

It's easy, the answer. It's God's word. He told us what he thinks.

That's a whole book he gave us so we would know how God thinks and how our mind should be. We're supposed to have the mind of Christ. You know that? In all areas, we're supposed to have the mind of Christ.

So, what is the mind of Christ? It's all here, black and white. And we're supposed to adjust our mind, change it to what makes God profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction. See, here it's correction.

Our mind needs to be corrected for training in righteousness. In Joshua 1.8, the book of the law or God's word shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do according to the law in it. For then, you will make your way prosperous and then you will have success.

Joshua 1.8. That says your Christian life will work how it's supposed to work if you take God's word and you put it in your mind and be transformed by it and abide by it. And then these things in your life will need to change and your actions will line up with God's word. Now, it will not happen by itself.

Our mind doesn't change by itself. We must commit ourselves to renew our mind by this God's word. You really need to make a commitment to that.

You must actively look, what does God's word say of your life including how to make a commitment, how to hold fast, how to be faithful, how to be steadfast and then be committed to change your thinking so it will line up with God's thinking. Now, there are three steps, very easy. You know, read the passages in the Bible that deals with like commitment or holding fast or if you have a problem in your marriage, read the things about marriage and then here it is what God says about this and then look what am I practicing and compare the two.

You look at what God says, compare what you practice and if you find that what you practice is not the same like God's word says, then change. Change to what God says. It's very simple and we need to do that in every area of our Christian life.

You read what it says about your mouth, how you should speak or how you're supposed to submit to your husband any of these areas. Read what it says, compare what you practice. If you find you practice something else than what it says, you change to what God's word says and then you will experience how God will answer your promises, how this Christian life will work.

Now, we're still talking about holding fast. How can we learn to hold fast? So the first thing was we need to renew our mind about holding fast and clinging to God's promises. And then the second thing we need to do in learning to hold fast is to follow Christ's example in holding fast.

You know, the Bible says that Jesus is our example we're supposed to follow. So we need to learn from him so we can become like him. Now, you can go through the New Testament and study his life in regard to faithfulness, in regard to commitment, in regard to steadfastness, in regard to holding on.

Look what he did. Study his life. You know, when Jesus made the decision to become our Savior, he made that decision before the foundation of the world.

Before the world was ever created, he made the decision I will become their Savior when they sin and he knew we would do that, you know. It wasn't if he knew ahead of time Adam and Eve won't last in the garden too long. And Jesus made that decision to become our Savior at that time.

You know what he did? He never looked back. He never wavered about this decision. He could have said I changed my mind.

I'm not going through with it. That would be like we would have done it. But he never wavered and then when it was time to strip himself of all the glory and all the power and all the joy and all the worship he experienced in heaven being God and come to earth as a baby, he never looked back on his decision.

He didn't second guess it. He didn't say I don't want this. A dirty stable and living in this world.

And when we look at his life in this sinful and corrupt world how difficult and depressing it was for him. Way more than for us. We are so used to sin.

We are so used to corruptness. But Jesus was sinless. All he knew was holiness and God's glory and the light that was there and now he comes down to this earth and he sees what mankind has become.

You know I think one of you asked me about the book about the slum dog. You know these people live in the slums. Mankind was never created to end up in the slum.

Never created to tear each other apart. Never created to kill each other in wars. Jesus God created us for joy for happiness for peace for the same holiness that he has.

Now he comes to this earth how depressing how sad it was how much he must have suffered in his heart to look what mankind became. But he never changed his mind to be our savior. He didn't say it's too depressing down here I go back.

And then when people misunderstood him when people accused him when they opposed him when they rejected him and tried to kill him he could have wavered but he didn't. He never looked back and many of his disciples were offended when his teaching didn't line up with their expectations and many walked away. Yet Jesus held fast to his decision to become our savior.

And think about it the Romans ruled Palestine at the time and they crucified criminals all the time. The crosses they would have the crosses with the criminals that they crucified lying along the street where people walked where people traveled so they will see it and be scared to do something against Rome. Jesus knew what was waiting for him.

I don't know if you have seen the movie from Mel Gibson The Passion of the Christ. I think some of you have seen it. Jesus knew this was waiting for him.

He saw it all the time. That's what the Romans did. They scorched people.

They crucified people for their crimes. When he was seeing this he could have turned back but he held fast to his decision. He did not waver.

He was steadfast. Actually it says when it was time for him to die that he set his face resolutely toward Jerusalem steadfastly. You know Peter was telling him don't do this thing you know don't talk about it you know.

Jesus wouldn't listen. And when it came time for him to die he was not wavering. He didn't go in the opposite direction.

He knew exactly what pain and agony was waiting for him yet he held on to his decision. He never looked back. He steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem to die.

And then when he prayed in Gethsemane you know the weight of the whole world was laid upon him. And his body he was human like you and I. He had laid down all his divine powers and everything. He didn't waver in unbelief.

He didn't look back. He held fast to that decision he made before the foundation of the earth. And then of course when Judas betrayed him when they arrested him when all his disciples ran off Peter denied him three times.

He could have said I had enough. But he didn't. He held on.

He held fast. And then on the cross when God laid the sin of the whole world on him and when he was about to be separated from his father which I think that was the greatest agony of all. Jesus never wavered.

Jesus never looked back. Never changed his mind. He was holding fast.

This is our example. This is what we are supposed to learn from. Holding fast.

And then we can look at other people that went before us that were holding fast until the end. You know Paul he wrote to Timothy shortly before he was martyred. He was beheaded under Nero.

He wrote to Timothy I have fought the good fight. I have finished the cause. I have kept the faith.

And he walked to the execution block. So did almost all of the disciples except John. They were all martyred.

They all held fast until death. My dear sisters this is the example we are asked to follow. Holding fast.

Holding fast. And then how do we learn to hold fast? We need to take the opportunities God allows in our life to practice holding fast. You know we are supposed to become strong and unmovable and steadfast.

It will not happen by ourselves. We need some practice. You know if I make today a decision I want to grow my muscles like some of these bodybuilders.

They go like this and my goodness there is not a mouse but not even a rat. It's like a pig. Huge.

If I make a decision today and say oh yeah I raised my hand. Who wants to have a body like that? I raise my hand. Will I wake up one morning and my muscles have all grown just by making a decision? I have to head for the gym every day.

I have to eat a lot of things that help my muscles to grow. I have to exercise every day. See, we often when we have a meeting like this, you know, okay I want to learn how to hold fast.

I go, I pray with the pastor's wife and then I go home. Will you immediately now holding fast and you know how to do it and you can do it until death, until maybe you are martyred? Can you do it? Well, maybe some of you, but most of us need to start practicing the small things. My, I got four grandchildren.

Two are four years old and they go now to preschool and you know, they are learning to write some letters. Now, my little grandson sent me a little picture and he wrote Oma, which in my language is grandmother. Now, I can read it, but it's a little scribbly, you know, it's hanging this way.

In order to get it right, he has to practice some more and more and more. I am thrilled that he can write it, you know, but to get good at it, you know, he will have to practice and practice and that's the same thing. God will give us opportunities to practice first with smaller things and then with more difficult things so we can learn to hold fast.

But what do we do? Very often we walk away from these opportunities. And these are opportunities. You know, we don't want to practice.

We want to be instantly this person that can do all this. But it takes practice and God puts us in situations. He permits, I don't say he creates the situations, but he permits us to be in certain situations where we learn, where we can learn and practice to hold fast so we will become better and better at it.

You know, you may think about, you know, maybe your mother is ill. Now, there are God's promises that he will heal. That's an opportunity for you to hold fast to that promise until you see the fulfillment.

Or, you know, there are problems you cannot solve. You have no means to solve it. Think about the economy.

God wants us to practice to hold fast to his promises that he will provide for us. That he is our provider. Or circumstances you can't do nothing about.

Many of our places are now hit by the hurricane Sandy. No one could do anything about it. They could only report what's happening.

They couldn't stop it. There are things in our life we have no control over. We can't do anything about it.

These are all opportunities for us to practice and learn to hold fast to the promises God gave us in spite of the circumstances. And then we have people in our life that we love. But we can't change them.

It may be a husband. It may be some children. It may be parents.

Maybe some child went astray. Or some of us have unsafe relatives. And whatever we told them in the past never worked.

Nothing is changing and turning them. This is an opportunity for you to cling like this little badger to the board, cling to God's promise, don't let go until you see the fulfillment, holding fast. If you actually check your life, you will see that God gives you so many opportunities to practice holding fast.

You know, it says about Abraham that he grew strong in faith. It doesn't mean that he started out with Father Abraham was all the faith. He grew strong in faith.

God gave him so many opportunities to practice faith in patience. And he grew in it. He made mistakes and sometimes he messed it up.

But he grew strong in faith through practice. You got all the teaching. I know that when you go to Calvary Chapel your pastor will teach through the Bible.

You got it all in your head, but now you need to practice. Practice holding on and God gives you opportunities. Now, the most important thing is that we don't quit God's training program.

He's putting you in a training program to hold fast. Don't quit the program. Even when it takes longer than you expected.

I think most of you remember the movie Karate Kid. This young man, he wanted to become a karate expert and compete in this competition. So Mr. Miyagi is signing him on, you know, to learn this karate.

So he comes all prepared the first day to learn all these moves, you know. And what does Mr. Miyagi do? Wax on, wax off. And that for days, for days.

And then he has to paint his fence and he has to do this and that. And in the end he gets so mad and says, I wanted to learn karate, but you are making me polish your cars and painting your house and all this. And then he shows to him the moves you made, painting the fence and waxing, these are actually the basic moves you need to know for the real thing.

And then a light comes on in his head and that is what happens to us. We think, what is God doing with me? He is allowing you to practice so you will become increasingly steadfast like the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, the result of God's training, we will become steadfast, unmovable like Jesus.

You know, holding fast in spite of opposition or persecution. Now, you may not have much persecution here, but it's very real in some other countries. But you may face ridicule and your friends don't like you anymore.

Holding on in fast, holding fast in spite of opposition and persecution is one of the things that our missionaries in Asia have to do every day. Persecution is everywhere. It's not a matter of if you get persecuted, it's a matter of when it will come to you.

I remember years ago, I met a young man in Nepal. At that time, Nepal was still very, very strict. It still is.

About Christianity, you will go to prison. At that time, people had to go to prison. If you give someone or witness to someone, give a gospel tract, you go to prison for a year.

If you baptize someone, you go to prison for three years. Now, this young man, they were telling me his name is Ramesh and he's an elder of the church of that and that village. I said, an elder? Doesn't he look rather young? They said, yeah, he is young, but when he was 14 years old, one of national missionaries came to his village and preached the gospel and he was the only person that responded.

The result of him receiving Christ was that he was kicked out by his parents and kicked out by the whole village. He was living alone in a hut outside the village by himself, having to try to make a living, but because of him holding on to his faith in Jesus, 40 people in this village came to know the Lord and there was a church and he was the oldest Christian. So when he was 18 years old, he was the elder of the church, holding on in spite of opposition, then holding on fast to your calling, never looking back.

Maybe some of you are called to serve the Lord. All of us are called to be a witness for the Lord, but holding on to our calling like the Lord Jesus never to look back. In one of the villages in northeast India, a husband and wife started to preach among the Muslim community and some people came to faith, but the missionary, one day he got stabbed to death by people that were opposing him.

Then the wife and the small children were there. Now everybody expected including her parents that she would leave that place. She said, I won't leave.

I will continue what my husband started. God called us here. There is a church today in that village.

Holding on to your calling. Very, very important. Then holding fast until we see the fulfillment of God's promises.

Now, I know of a mother, her daughter, she went astray in such a way that it broke the parents' heart. They didn't know what to do, but they decided we will hold on to God's promises. Holding on and holding on I was watching how these parents, especially the mother, you could see she was wasting away.

Her heart was so torn in pieces about her daughter. But you know what happened? Holding on in faith, holding on in faith, one day this daughter made a call and said, I want to come home. Today this daughter is serving the Lord.

She is even teaching in the church. God changed her totally. It was so impossible to think that that girl would ever change.

But the parents decided we will do nothing else but hold on to God's promises. And then the result of God's training for us is to hold on until death or until the Lord comes back. You remember Stephen, the first martyr of the church? You know, he got the chance to defend himself and he could have said, well, never mind what I said before, you know, but he was holding on to his faith and rather chose death.

This is what God wants to do in our life. Let us hold fast the confession of our faith, the promises that God gives us. You know, we live right now way closer to the return of Christ than all the generations before us.

The letter was written 2,000 years ago. And it says, you know, that Jesus is coming soon. We're supposed to hold fast.

And the signs of his coming have greatly multiplied. Don't take God's training lightly. If he wants to train you to hold fast, don't take it lightly because you will not survive as a Christian if you don't learn how to hold fast to God's promises.

You won't survive. It will become increasingly difficult, even in our time. You have to make up your mind, you know, I will hold fast before you are in the middle of struggles.

You know, sometimes we are so fluent with our commitment. We say, well, when the time comes, I will decide. But when the time comes, we are so emotionally involved and so torn apart by the events, we are not capable of making very good decisions.

We need to make a decision now. I want to hold fast. I want to learn this.

I don't want to walk off. I will stay in God's training program and be thankful that he sends me opportunities where I can be trained how to hold on in faith with patience until we see the fulfillment. And then let's look to Jesus.

He is worthy for us to hold fast. He is worthy. What he all done for us, he never looked back.

Let us honor him before the world and before the angels of heaven with our steadfastness. Shall we pray together? Lord Jesus, we want to thank you that your word is teaching us what we should do to hold fast to your promises until we see the fulfillment that you promised to us. Lord, many of us have difficult situations at home and maybe at work and maybe with children or spouses or relatives.

Lord, we ask you that you help us to learn and to practice and to hold on to your promise. Thank you that you are faithful, that you not only teach us but that you help us to practice so we can become like you, that we will never look back but that we will be faithful until we see your face. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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