

Series: Tools of Faith
Title: Holding onto God
Text: James 1:16-18
Key Word: Attributes
Proposition: Everyone can persevere in the relationship with God by holding these attributes of God.

Good Morning everyone. We're delighted that you have chosen to worship God with us today. I invite you to take out your sermon-handout. This tool can be helpful to write down any thoughts or insights that you may want to remember.

As you can see, we're in the midst of a series entitled, "Tools of Faith." We're exploring a short letter penned by James, a half-brother of Jesus. He also led the church in Jerusalem. In the weeks to come James will teach us the tools of a vital faith. These tools will equip us to develop the mind of Christ and His heart of love.

Last week we took out our second tool to help us build a vital, healthy faith. We learned that a screwdriver can remind us to tighten our relationship with God so that money can lose its grip upon our lives. Our attitude toward God and money can either strengthen our faith or it can loosen it.

Earlier this spring I had to remove an old worn out garden house from an outside water faucet. I gripped the metal end of the hose, attempting to turn it counter-clockwise. I squeezed my fingers around the metal nut. I was unable to move the nut. My fingers could not hold it tight enough. They slipped. I realized I needed a device, a tool to tighten my hold on the metal nut.

I retrieved a pair of pliers from my tool box, opened and closed the metal jaws, grasping the metal nut. I turned the nut counter-clockwise, slowly the nut loosened. I was

then able to free the hose from the outside water faucet. The pliers enabled me to hold on to the nut.

We use pliers to hold onto something that may be hot to our touch, or things that are slippery, or things which require a firm hold. They strengthen our grip.

Life does present moments when we need something to strengthen our grip. When we're faced to spend more money than what our cash flow allows, we need something to strengthen our grip against this temptation. A tragedy like, the tragic death of friend or family member, the abandonment of a spouse, parent, or a friend, calls us to find something to strengthen our grip on life. Unemployment, a wayward child, or depreciating retirement funds require that something extra to strengthen our grip. James calls us to hold onto God, to tighten our grip on Him. How can we apply the jaws of our faith onto God? James simply calls us to remember who He is.

First, God never deceives. *“Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers and sister.”*

(James 1:16) Sin is deceptive, and Satan is always seeking to deceive us. Eve was correct when she said, “The serpent deceived me.” (Genesis 3:13) Peter was right when he warned us to *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”* (1 Pet. 5:8)

In contrast God never deceives. He always deals with truth. Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”* (John 14:6) He said that if we would know Him, we would know the truth, and the truth would set us free. (Jn 8:32)

In February 2009, Alex Rodriguez, all-star third baseman for the New York Yankees and the highest paid player in baseball, admitted taking banned substances

between 2001 and 2003. In an interview with ESPN baseball columnist Peter Gammons, Rodriguez said: “I did take a banned substance. ... I do remember thinking in my bed in Arizona, it was like, *What am I doing? Wake up. Stop being selfish.* And you get to a point where you get tired of being stupid and selfish and not being honest with yourself. And that's what I realized in '03. So I am sorry for my Texas years. I apologize to the fans of Texas. And, uh, there's absolutely no excuse. ... It feels good coming out and being completely honest. ... You take this gorilla and this monkey off your back, you realize that honesty is the only way. ... The truth needed to come out a long time ago, and I'm glad it's coming out today. ... The truth will set you free.”

We should not be deceived regarding the source of evil – Satan. For many years Satan kept A. Rod deceived, believing a lie, forcing him to hide, hide from himself, hide from the press, hide from major league baseball. Pride prevented him from acknowledging the truth. Finally, he came out of hiding, perhaps hearing God’s voice, and confronted the truth. He strengthened his grip by holding onto the God of truth.

Second, God gives all that is good. James wrote, “*Every good and perfect gift is from above,*” (James 1:17a) There is nothing which comes from God which is not good. God loves us and desires what is best for us. It is out of his nature to give. Because He is good, He delights in giving good gifts to those who trust Him.

He is the source of all that which is good. He is not only the source of good, but He is the One who is committed to making all things work together for good for His children, for those who are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

With so much suffering in our world, and in our lives, we find it hard to see that God is good. We wonder why bad things happen to good people. We often find ourselves thinking: “If God is good and loving, and all-powerful, why doesn’t God put a stop to suffering?”

Throughout my twenty some years of ministry I have walked with hundreds of individuals and families through a multitude of crisis, and I have seen them and yes, even I have wrestled with these questions. I could deliver a whole message on this one topic. But, I will simply say this. Suffering does not occur because our faith is weak, but through it our faith in God’s goodness may be strengthened. It is not God’s desire for us, but suffering happens in life. It does not occur to teach us something, but through it we may learn. Suffering is not punishment, but sometimes it is the consequence of our poor judgment or sinful behavior. God does not depend upon human suffering to fulfill His purposes, but sometimes through suffering, God’s good purposes are achieved. We have a choice, we can allow suffering to make us bitter or we can allow it to make us better.

From God’s lens of goodness, all our suffering, and even our death is but a ‘slight momentary affliction that is preparing us for the glory and beauty of eternity. Out of his goodness He comforts us when we mourn, walks with us through the valley and redeems the suffering of this world to ultimately serve his purposes. He invites us to do all the good we can so to minimize the suffering around us. Seeing and possessing the promise of the Resurrection becomes the best that God offers us. Holding onto God’s promise strengthens our grip in the face of suffering.

Third, God never changes. James wrote, “*God...who does not change like the shifting shadows.*” (James 1:17b) God is unchangeable. The Bible reminds us, “*Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.*” (Deut.31:6) “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*” (Hebrews 13:5, 8) “*The one who calls you is faithful.*” (1 Thess. 5:24)

Jayne O'Conner said, "I grew up thinking that someone was watching over me. I feel a little less watched over now." She was talking about the Old Man of the Mountain, a 40-foot tall natural outcropping of granite ledges in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, which looked like the profile of an old man.

Two hundred years ago Nathaniel Hawthorn wrote a famous story about it: "The Great Stone Face." The image was on New Hampshire license plates and quarters and about a million souvenirs; it was the official state emblem. Sometime in May, 2003, in a heavy fog, the 700-ton face fell. It broke apart and slid down the mountain in the dark.

Steven Heath, one of the nearby residents, said, "It's something that has been a part of our lives forever. At first it was disbelief. No one could believe he came down. It's like a member of your family dying."

Another man said, "I'm absolutely devastated by this. It makes you wonder if God is unhappy with what is going on."

There are times when it seems the most dependable, reliable presence in your life disappears into the fog in the middle of the night. The next morning, that "mountain" you've depended on is gone, and "it makes you wonder if God is unhappy."

Don't be deceived, my friends, though the earth may crumble, we have a friend, a Savior, by the name of Jesus Christ, who will never crumble: "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever." He never changes.

Finally, God gives birth to life. James wrote, "*He chose to give us birth through the word of truth...*" (James 1:18) God gives birth to life through the Good News of Jesus Christ so that we can be reborn into a new life. Rebirth is into a family and the possession/property of God. Without a doubt God is the aggressive initiator, the pursuing lover, He is the one who loved us even while we were his enemies. (Romans 5:8)

John wrote, "*Yet, to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*" John 1:12, 13

The runners for the Special Olympic, 400-meter dash were being helped to their marks. A gentleman in a three-piece suit jumped up in the stands and began yelling, "Lenny! Lenny!" An overweight middle-aged man with Down's Syndrome looked up in the direction of the voice.

The gun sounded and the runners leaped forward—all except Lenny, who was dead last and losing ground. He had a preoccupation with his hands, which he wrung furiously as he tried to make his way around the track. Pointing to him, the gentleman turned and addressed the section of the crowd. "That's my son, Lenny. Isn't he doing great?"

When Lenny reached the last turn on the track, the other runners had already finished. The gentleman began to shout encouragement to his son, throwing his fists in the air in a triumphant gesture. "Great job, Lenny! Way to go, son. Keep going, you're doing

great!" He turned to the section again, and reminded the crowd that his son was about to finish. They applauded dutifully, feeling somewhat embarrassed. When Lenny crossed the finish line, the man made his way down to the track and hugged his son, who was exhausted, drooling, and still wringing his hands.

While the crowd watched them embrace, a few began to weep. They were thinking about what they saw. It seems as though God was speaking, "You're like Lenny in this race I have called you into. You're challenged, perplexed, far behind the pack. Most days, you're a pitiful pile of exhaustion. But I'm here, cheering you on. I love you the way that man loves his son."

This word of truth, this love strengthens our grip on life. It empowers us to finish the race, for we know our Father has left the stands in the form of us Son, and embraces us. Such truth removes the deceptive lies, affirms all that is good, and reassures His persistent love. 1970