

LETTING GO OF HOLDING ON

Sunday, Dec. 31, 2023

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So, how many people have a closet or drawer or garage that is filled with clutter? There's more stuff in it than there's room for it. How many people have plastic bags filled with other plastic bags? [Congregants laugh] Anybody? How many people have a drawer with butter containers or old Tupperware with no lids? And my favorite, a miscellaneous drawer with toothpicks and paper clips and rubber bands and – my favorite – multiple pens that do not work. [Congregants laugh]

You know, as we come to the end of this year, and we begin a new year, I want to talk about our tendency to hold on: to hold on to the past; to hold on to “stuff”; to hold on to emotional pain; to hold on to limiting beliefs; to hold on to unhealthy and unfulfilling friendships and relationships. Holding on to dreams that have long gone and are not possible; holding on to things that no longer serve us. How many people have ever held on to something that you knew was not good for you to hold on? Anybody ever have that experience?

You know, whenever I find us, as human beings, doing things that seem so counter to the kind of life that we want to have, I always ask why? Why is it that we hold on to things that aren't good for us?

One of the four reasons that I have is that we are taught and conditioned to hold on. We think holding on is always good; holding on is safe; holding on is the best. We hear phrases like hold on, hold tight, hold strong, hold fast, hold it together. [Congregants laugh] There's all kinds of “hold it” kind of things. And so we're almost programmed to just hold on.

The second thing is about attachment. We have attachment to certain things and certain times in our lives, certain experiences. And we feel, if we keep holding onto them, that somehow we'll get that happiness back again. Holding onto the glory days; holding onto that outfit that doesn't fit us now that we hope one day will fit us again [congregants laugh], so we can feel good again like we did back then. And also we get attached sometimes to not-so-healthy things. Sometimes we get attached to drama or chaos or not being treated well. And we almost keep being attached and drawn to it.

Another reason why we hold on is for blame and punishment. Sometimes someone has hurt us and we feel betrayed or angry. We think hating and resenting them will punish them in some way and we get to blame them for why we're not feeling happy right now. And we also blame ourselves with regret, with shame and guilt, and beat ourselves up and blame ourselves for why our lives aren't as good as it could be and we want it to be.

And the last one is that holding on to distracts us from accepting full responsibility and creating a greater version of our lives ourselves. You know, sometimes holding on really prevents us from learning, from growing and risking and stepping out into the unknown to discover who we really are. We'd rather hold on and be stuck in the past than accept full responsibility for our lives and move forward.

So could you imagine if we freed ourselves from the clutter? From the emotional baggage, from the distractions? If we freed ourselves from all of it, what would we do? If you absolutely freed up all that energy and that time that we invest in holding on, what would you create? What would you achieve? Who would you become? I mean, what would you do with your life in this new year if you were able to release and let all that stuff go?

One of my favorite quotes is by a British physician named Havelock Ellis, and he says this:

"All the art of living lies in the fine mingling of letting go and holding on."

And what he's saying, in my opinion, is the quality of your life and how masterfully you live your life, comes down to one thing: how well and how wisely you use the power of letting go and the power of holding on.

How many people here have ever held on to something you should have let go and let go of something you should have held on to? Anybody have that experience? And, you know, the thing about it is discerning what to hold on to and discerning what to let go of. And to really be able to do that, we need a level of self-awareness. We need to pay attention. We need to use wisdom and insight. We need to use our intuition, our understanding. And it means we need to tune in and to stay present and engaged in our lives and our feelings, and what's really going on.

What I find interesting is that we are taught to hold on and we're good at holding on. We can hold on easily! But when it comes to letting go, we hate letting go. Letting go is hard. Letting go is scary. You know why? Because letting go means we need to be vulnerable. Letting go makes us feel like we're out of control: *"If I let go, I'll lose everything!"* Letting go brings us to the place we don't like, and that is uncertainty and the unknown when we fully have to let everything go.

If you look at every single spiritual practice that's difficult, it requires an element of letting go. go. When we hear we need to surrender to God. It means you got to let go. Forgiveness. Got to let go. Tithing. Got to let it go! [Congregants laugh] When we say, *"Not my will, but thy will be done,"* got to let go. When it says, *"Be transformed by the renewing of your mind ..."* guess what? You gotta let go. To be still and know your oneness with God, you gotta let go.

Letting go is a vital, transformational, powerful, healing spiritual practice. It just scares us. But it is one of the most liberating things and the greatest gifts we can give ourselves.

Let me give you an example, how important it is. In the Bible, a great example of the impact of not letting go. And remember in the Book of Genesis, Chapter 19, the story with Lot and his wife? And they're running away from Sodom and Gomorrah that's burning, and they're warned, *"Do not look back or you will be turned into a pillar of salt."* So what'd she do? She looked back and she was turned into a pillar of salt.

But I want to share the symbolism of a pillar of salt, because they're saying don't look back; just keep looking ahead. And there are consequences if you just keep looking back and dwelling in the past. And it's a pillar of salt. Salt is a preservative. And pillars are known to not move forward very fast. [Congregants laugh] So I want you to hear the double emphasis there. It's saying if you keep looking back, you can't move forward with your life. You will be preserved and stuck in the pain of the past, the patterns of the past, the limitations of the past ... and you will not be able to move forward.

Letting go is powerful. It's not easy. It's hugely valuable, but something we need to practice in our lives if we want to move forward in a greater way. Michael Beckwith said 100 % of spiritual growth is about letting go. Why? Because we are pure spirit. We are made in the image and likeness and the essence and the love and the beauty and the joy of God. And the only reason that we don't experience that, is that we've held on to so many things that aren't true about ourselves, told ourselves, and accepted ourselves to be lesser than we really are. Growth is about letting go.

So my question is: If Havelock Ellis was right – that the art of living is the mingling of letting go and holding on -- maybe instead of making resolutions this year, we should discover the art of living by learning how to let go and how to hold on. [Phone rings] Can you tell them I'll call them back after? after a few minutes? I'm a little busy. [Congregants laugh]

Alright. So here we go. So at the beginning of this year, let me ask you a question: What do you think you need to let go? Well, I'm going to give you three suggestions of possibilities. [Congregants laugh]

The first one is to let go of the clutter and the stuff in our lives. You know, the physical stuff that crams our closets and crams us in so many ways. It looks like it's just physical stuff, and it does clog up a lot of space ... but it also clogs up a lot of mental space; a lot of spiritual, vibrational, creative energies are stuck when we just have so much stuff.

The first practice is to give away. To throw away, to go through your stuff and just lighten it up a little bit. I bet every one of us has probably cleaned out some area and we felt so good after it. Could you imagine if we just cleaned a closet or a drawer or a room just once a week? What an incredible, freeing, liberating practice that would be!

You know what I find interesting? So the industry of self-storage is one of the most booming businesses in the country. It is unbelievable! In 2020, \$54 billion worldwide in storage! It is projected to go to \$83.7 billion by 2027. Here's the kicker: 90 % of that money -- 90 % of that revenue in storage -- is from the United States alone. [Congregation murmurs] As much as we have in our country, we also have this habit and tendency to need and want more. Want more! So much more that we don't have enough room in our own houses; we gotta go rent places offsite to put stuff we don't use!

I mean, we all need to ask our questions at some point. How much is enough to make me happy? Is more always better? And when is enough enough?

And I'm not slamming getting and achieving, but there is some line we need to look at about where is our real joy and happiness coming from? Where is our peace and fulfillment really coming from?

Everybody remember that book, *The Joy of Tidying Up*? Marie Kondo. I did a series on that a couple of years ago. And what she's saying is: keep stuff that brings you joy. And that's something we all need to do. "*Does this bring me joy? You know, why am I holding on to this? Is it time for me to release that?*"

And the thing is, at a minimum, it's gonna create some space that's just going to feel lighter and more peaceful. And then if you want to attract things, letting go and opening space by getting rid of stuff is also a very good and important thing to do. One of the great ways to free ourselves and free our spiritual energy is to let go of clutter and let go of stuff.

The second thing is to let go of emotional pain. Now, emotional pain occurs when we keep holding on to some hurt or feelings of betrayal and resentment. Or holding grudges. Or guilt or shame or jealousy, or any of these things. They cause emotional pain; sometimes it can even be even toxic.

You know, there was this young girl, she couldn't remember exactly the words in the Lord's Prayer, and she recited it saying, "*Lord, forgive us our trash baskets as we forgive those who put trash in our baskets.*" [Congregants laugh] And I think, as human beings, we put a lot of trash in each other's baskets. And I think we put a lot of trash in our own baskets.

I think one of the best ways to release and let go of emotional pain is forgiveness. Forgiveness means to untie, to loosen and free ourselves from something to move forward to a greater experience of life.

So my question for all of us is: Who do you need to forgive? And what do you need to forgive yourself for? You know, forgiveness really frees us, and it also heals us. And it opens our hearts; it opens our lives.

You know, I really believe that forgiveness is one of the greatest gifts we can give ourselves, and I actually consider it a great act of self-love. To love yourself enough to say, "*I'm not going to keep punishing myself reliving the pain of the past over and over again. I love myself enough to say, 'Stop!' and to forgive and free myself from the pain of the past.*"

And sometimes we think, *"I don't know how to forgive."* Well, that's okay! You don't need to know how to forgive. The only thing you need to do is: Are you willing to forgive? Are you willing to turn it over to God? Are you willing to reclaim your peace and take back your personal power? Because, when we keep blaming somebody else for our unhappiness, we're giving our power to them and not taking it back for ourselves. Are you willing to allow your heart to be healed? And especially, are you willing to send that person blessings of peace, love, and abundance?

Because if we believe that we are all one, and what we send out comes back to us, it behooves all of us to send those individuals we're struggling with blessings of peace, love and abundance.

And forgiveness is one of the hardest spiritual practices, but I believe it's one of the most liberating and powerfully healing things we can do for ourselves. And I think it's a vital life practice. Because, as human beings we're going to bump up with each other a lot. And we have to learn how to let go. Because we put a lot of trash in each other's baskets and we need to be able to empty them and not keep having them weigh us down as we move forward in living our lives. Letting go of the emotional pain by forgiveness.

The next one is letting go of limiting beliefs. And I'm going to make limiting beliefs – there are a whole range of them -- but I'm going to make them about the limiting beliefs that we hold about ourselves. About the negative self-talk we can put on ourselves. It's amazing how we put ourselves down saying things we think don't mean anything: *"I'm such an idiot. I'm such a knucklehead; such a loser."* My assistant in Kansas City always said, *"I am such a klutz. I am a klutz!"* She said that all the time!

You know, we say things like, *"You know, with my luck, things will probably go from bad to worse."* *"I'm just a hot mess."* We say these kind of things about ourselves. *"Who am I kidding? I'm not going to get that promotion."* *"You know, everybody always takes advantage of me."* *"Life is just so unfair."*

We say all these things and these messages -- these little comments -- you know what the message it gives? *"I am not lovable and I'm not worthy. I'm not worthy of happiness. I'm not worthy of love. I'm not worthy of success. I'm not worthy of a great life."*

And so what we need to do is to catch ourselves and say something better and truer and more positive about ourselves. So when we catch ourselves saying, *"I'm such an idiot,"* here's the line I just want you to tell yourself ... and that is, *"I am a child of God. God loves me and God wants the best for me."*

When you say *"I'm such a knucklehead ..."* No! Then you just say to yourself, *"I am a child of God. God loves me, and God wants the best for me."*

"Who am I kidding? I've got no chances." No! *"I'm a child of God. God loves me, and God wants the best for me."*

And it's a simple, powerful line of truth that when we connect and catch ourselves saying something that is not honoring, that is limiting and untrue of ourselves, we get back to the truth: *"I'm a child of God. God loves me, and God wants the best for me."*

Let's say that together: [with congregation] *"I am a child of God. God loves me, and God wants the best for me."*

One more time: [with congregation] *"I am a child of God. God loves me, and God wants the best for me."*

So, an interesting thing. I saw this interview, and it's this psychologist guy getting interviewed and he's doing some research. And he asked him the question and said: To become happier and a more positive person What's the single greatest thing we can do for ourselves? Is it to become more positive or is it to become less negative? And he said -- without hesitation -- he said: It is clear; all the evidence shows if

you want your life to get better and to be happier, it's about being less negative. If we could reduce by just a little the amount of negativity we hold about ourselves, it will increase the level of positivity that we feel. Because we'll be getting rid of the underlying, undermining beliefs and mindsets that limit us, which can free us to actually be more positive. And the reason I'm picking as a limiting belief ourselves, because I believe that how we feel about ourselves and our self-worth is the greatest indicator of how much love and joy and happiness and fulfillment we allow in our lives.

So that's the letting go portion of the service. Now how about holding on? What do you think this year, as you begin this year, would help you most for you to hold on to? And here are three suggestions.

The first one is to hold an intention for yourself and your life this year. An intention is a deliberate use of the power of our thoughts and minds to focus that mental energy towards some greater good that we desire. Intention directs and channels our creative energy towards the end that we set.

So my question is: What do you want to create? create? What do you want to attract? What do you want to experience in 2024? What is your intention for this year? What is the highest vision and possibility you can see for yourself? And let's see it in five areas: for your career and your work; for your relationships; for your health; for your finances; and for your spiritual life.

You know, holding an intention is about using the creative power of God. It is an activating force to attract things in the universe. We are powerful spiritual beings, and holding intentions – I mean, that's the beginning of creation. It is the beginning of transformation. The question is: Are we going to apply it and use it?

What I'd recommend for these five areas -- even if you write down just two goals or two intentions for each of the area, it will help you focus your attention and your time. You have to do tons of things, but do something and do it with focus; do it with intention; do it with your mind and do it with your heart.

The second one is to hold space. Anybody heard that expression, holding space? You know, I kind of knew what it meant, so I looked it up. Then I didn't like what it said when I looked it up, so now this is my version of what holding space means. [Congregants laugh]

And what it's really about ... like, holding space is about holding an intention for someone else that is non-judgmental; that is with nothing but compassion and love and support for them in the unfolding of what's best for them. And so it's not trying to fix anybody; it's trying to hold a space.

And you can hold space together in person or even not in person. And holding space for them might be just being able to listen with a compassionate heart while they're going through whatever they're struggling with. So they have a safe space just to share it. Or it could be you holding space for someone from a distant place of just holding and desiring whatever is best for their soul's unfoldment and to bring them greater peace and joy in life.

Because one of the things about life and having a good year -- It's about relationship. We might think we're in some kind of business, but we're in the people business. All of us. And the quality of all of our lives are reflected in the quality of our relationships. And being able to hold space for someone with compassion and an open heart without judgment is important, because in relationships we're going to bump up with each other. We're going to have misunderstandings and disagreements. And we're going to have to find some place to be able to open our heart in compassion and in care and supporting whatever's for their highest good

And it's an important thing for us to work on this. Because it's about relationship with others, and relationship with ourselves. Holding space for ourselves to be compassionate when we're not showing

up in our "A game"; when we're making mistakes. You know, we've got to have compassion and hold space for ourselves.

So Larry Dossey wrote a book called *Healing Words*. And in it, they did a study about the power of prayer. And they did a study with these Petri dishes of bacteria. And the first group just prayed that the bacteria would multiply by a hundred. [Congregants laugh] And the second group prayed whatever is for the highest and best of the bacteria.

Now, I have no idea what the definition of the highest and best of bacteria is [congregants laugh], but let's just go with what they said. And they found the most effective form of prayer – one's called directive: hundred times better. The other one, whatever is for the best: non-directive. Guess which one was more powerful? Nondirective: whatever's for the highest and best. For the bacteria, let it be done.

And the reason that's important? I bet everybody in this room has somebody in your life that you think if they'd only do this or only do that, that things would get better. And that may be the case, but it creates tension when we keep holding that. The non-directive way: the holding space way of just saying, *"Whatever's for the highest and best, let that be done. Whatever will bring their souls the greatest peace, whatever is for the evolution of their own consciousness, whatever fulfills the purpose that for they were here, let that be done."*

And it's all out of love, but there is a huge distinction. And it's an important thing to learn how to hold space for any and every kind of relationship.

And the last one. Is it the last one? Already? [Laughs with congregation]

Okay. **The last one is to hold a positive outlook.** How many people have seen this show, *Ted Lasso*? Anybody seen that? Love that guy! Positive! I mean, I just love him. And so in one of the shows, he was talking about the fact that he doesn't know a lot about soccer. His lack of soccer strategy and knowledge, you know, maybe in some way to work to help them. And Rebecca, the owner of the soccer team, says to him --and it's a quote by a Dutch soccer player named Johan Cruyff. And the quote is this: *"Every disadvantage has its advantage."*

Every disadvantage has its advantage. I've mentioned this before, but I love the example. Sylvester Stallone was born with Bell's palsy -- a facial issue, paralysis -- and he spoke with a slur. And when he was struggling, he wrote *Rocky* after being inspired by a Muhammad Ali fight with a guy named Chuck Wepner, who got the stuffing popped out of him, but he wouldn't give up.

And so he wrote this thing, and he was trying to sell it to the studios. And bad boy was broke. He had to sell his dog. He was broke! And they said, *"We love it. We'd like to have it. And we want Robert Redford, James Caan, or Bert Reynolds to do it."* And he said, *"No, no; I'm Rocky. It's going to be me. It's going to be me."* They said, *"No, no, we don't want you in the movie, not you."*

And then they offered him \$265,000 to not be Rocky. They were going to pay him to not have him! And he said, *"No; I'm Rocky."* This underdog, this tough guy from Philly. And then he finally got a studio and they said, *"Okay, we'll pay you \$35,000 to be Rocky."* They had some incentives if it did well.

Well, the thing is: the disadvantage of his speech became a huge advantage in playing that so convincingly. It sold so much and did so well at the box office, his \$35,000 turned to \$2.5 million! But he was so convincing! And it's a perfect example of a disadvantage having its advantage.

I had a friend who shed cancer, and it took her a while and she was able to get over it. And then her sister got cancer – a more serious type of cancer. And she was devastated almost more when her sister got it than when she got it. And so things were not looking good for her sister. And she ended up leaving

her job to take full-time care of her sister. And so she took care of her, and it was tough to see her sister just kind of whittling away and deteriorating. And they talked and they laughed and they shared and they cried. And they had all these gut-wrenchingly honest talks about life and their family, and their whole experience and dying. And so, nine months later, her sister died. And so, in chatting with her a few times, it came out that -- she said as horrible as God cancer was, and that experience it was, she said it was one of the most beautiful and precious experiences she ever had. She said if it wasn't for the cancer, the disadvantage, she would never have had the experience and the time to share that level of depth and closeness with her sister.

Every disadvantage has its advantage. You all know I've been kind of struggling with this whole foot thing for the last year. I spent more time in the wheelchair than I have standing. And it's not been easy. It's not been my favorite thing. But as I've meditated and contemplated over these many months, it has had some advantage. A couple of them are, first, is that you move a lot faster rolling with wheels than you do with crutches. [Congregants laugh]

And the second thing is that I couldn't drive and so I needed to get rides. And there were two people who drove me. And the interactions of sharing and laughing and getting to know each other just in a little car ride. I've come to love and appreciate and enjoy them, and it's developed cool relationships because of this. That disadvantage got me another advantage.

The other thing is: when I sit in the chair and deliver a talk, I get to use both my hands. Right now, you can't see both at the same time. [Congregants laugh] Otherwise, that could be problematic! [Congregants laugh] And so, being able to speak with both my hands -- and I'm pretty expressive guy! -- and so my hands just naturally move. So, you know, when you stand, you can't do that as much, but getting to sit, that was the advantage.

And the last advantage was, you know, ever since I got paralyzed in a car accident years ago, I never wanted to be in a wheelchair. I never wanted to be seen as anything but normal and active and successful. I was driven like crazy. You know, I mean, skydiving and hang gliding, skiing. I'd do anything and everything. And some of that is good.

But then you have to look at a little deeper. And some of it was about not feeling like I was enough. Not feeling that I was worthy. You know, sitting back in the chair, in some ways, was a little embarrassing for me, if I'm really honest with myself. And over the last few months, it's been good to look at that disadvantage and realize that there are some great advantages. And what it helped me do is begin to heal myself and how I saw myself -- how I felt about myself -- and to start to feel more whole and more comfortable, more confident in myself, sitting or standing. It was a wonderful advantage from this disadvantage.

So what disadvantage do you feel that you experienced in 2023? And would you be willing to go back and revisit and look at it and ask yourself: What was the advantage -- and is the advantage -- in that? And as we move into this new year, to hold the mindset maybe, that every disadvantage has its advantage? And to look for that all through the way? Because that'll make us have a better year -- to hold a more positive perspective. Maybe the disadvantage will help us see from a new place -- a perspective with greater insights and understanding of life and ourselves and our relationships; to help us enjoy life more fully.

Napoleon Hill said, *"Every adversity, every failure, every heartache carries with it a seed to an equal or greater benefit."* I think we should all hold the intention to have a positive outlook this new year, because every disadvantage really does have its advantage.

When I was a kid -- I was one of 10 kids -- with our parents every year, the most fun tradition and one I remember the most was on New Year's Eve, we all ... The house had to be clean. And I mean, vacuum-behind-the-fridge clean, wiping-down-everything clean. All the laundry had to be done. You had to go through all your clothes and give away or throw away the things that you weren't using anymore. We had to all get showered up and put on some nice clothes. We usually got clothes for Christmas, so it was usually our Christmas outfit. We all had to have money in our pockets, bills and coins. Everyone, even if it was 10 cents and a dollar; it didn't matter. Everybody had. We decorated with balloons the house. We got all excited about everything.

There was a table filled with food -- every kind of food you could imagine. We had black eyed peas, because we heard black eyed peas brought you good luck. And then we had pork or ham because we heard that the pigs move forward, and we wanted to move forward. So we had ham. Then we heard that chickens scotch backwards, which means they're saving. So we had chicken, too, to cover all the bases of good luck we could get with our food! Every kind of food, drinks, everything to represent abundance. To begin the year with abundance. And then we do the countdown and 10, 9, 8 -- popping balloons, hugging everybody! Opening the front door to let the new year air in! And then we'd hold hands around the table of abundance and my dad would say a beautiful prayer. And then we'd eat and then we'd dance 'til two in the morning.

And the thing I love most about that tradition is: it prepared us for the new year. It got us ready and excited for the opportunity to get to live another year. And to do it with intention, to do it with joy, to do it with enthusiasm was really a cool tradition that I miss and I loved as a kid.

One of the other traditions we do is New Year's resolutions. Interesting thing about New Year's resolutions: Do you know that twenty three percent of people stop pursuing their resolutions after a week? [Congregants laugh] Do you know 43% stop after the end of January; only nine percent of people who set resolutions finish them. That's why someone said, *"May all your troubles last as long as your New Year's resolutions."* [Congregants laugh] Because New Year's resolutions go in one year and out the other. [Congregants groan] And so, okay, not the best joke to end on. [Laughs] Okay; all right.

So instead, this year, of making resolutions, why don't we practice the art of living and the "fine mingling of letting go and holding on"? Letting go of the clutter by cleaning up our physical stuff; letting go of our emotional pain by forgiving; letting go of our limiting beliefs by speaking more positively to ourselves. And, of course, holding on: holding an intention in those five areas; holding space for ourselves and others; and also holding a positive outlook, knowing that every disadvantage has its advantage.

Let's make this a great year by practicing letting go of holding on! Whoop! [Congregants whoop and applaud]