

**“A Love that Never Lets Go”**  
**Hebrews 10:19-25**

*Series: Strengthening Your Grip Week 3. Love*  
The Rev. Dr. Douglas C. Hoglund

The Woodside Church

November 17, 2021

Ken Davis speaks at large Christian conferences. He tells a story about his daughter Tracy I'm sure will grip the heart of every parent.

Kids don't like it when you say, "I love you," and try to hug them. But don't stop saying it. With my daughter, I tried to coerce her. I'd say, "I love you." She replied, "Me too." I said, "Say it." She said, "I just did." When she was 14, 15, 16, I did not hear the words "I love you" from her.

It doesn't matter whether you sit at the top of a corporate tower or drive a tractor on a farm, it doesn't matter whether you're a teenager or an adult — all of us are born with this desperate need to be loved, and we do things that destroy our lives trying to heal that wound in our hearts.

When my daughter was 16, I cornered her in the kitchen one day and said, "Honey, I love you. I love you." She said, "Whatever." She might as well have pulled a knife and run it through my heart.

When she was 18, I was about to leave her in her college dorm room. With tears streaming down my face I grabbed her by the shoulders and established eye contact and said, "Tracy, I love you." And at 18 years old she said, "Me too." I drove 800 miles weeping because I wanted to be loved. I just wanted to be loved.

Several months later I was invited to speak at her school. I enjoy speaking, but that day I was terrified because she was in the audience and I didn't want to embarrass her. I gave my speech, and afterward the college chaplain invited me out to lunch. My daughter went to class. We went to a nice Italian restaurant. He pulled from his briefcase a stack of several hundred response cards. He read what the kids wrote about my message.

I was gratified. I took a bite of spaghetti. He reached into his pocket for a single card. He said, "Here's a card that I think will interest you." I looked at the card. Written on the front was my daughter's name, Tracy Lynn Davis. And I couldn't turn it over.

+ + + + + + + +

Like Ken, all of us ache for love. We were created to love and to be loved. We have this need to hug and hold on. I can feel a hug long after a person lets go. Don't you think one of the most awkward experiences these twenty-one months of covid has been reading the hug signals? You're saying goodbye to a friend or family member. In 2019 you'd give a hug. Now, you're not sure. Do they want a hug or not? Like two cowboys in a showdown, you lock eyes, stand your ground, assess the signals, watch for even the slightest arm movement. Even if they wave you in, do they want the full hug, the partial, the side back slap, the extended arms? It can be really embarrassing if you go all in and they give you the social distance stiff arm.

Some live with that distance their whole lives. A parent, a child, a spouse, a sibling, a friend a peer group keeps you at arms' length. With cruel words, abusive treatment or devastating silence, with constant absence, withering criticism, thoughtless negligence, or outright rejection they leave a hunger for love in

your heart. Mother Teresa, who fed the poor, said, “There is more hunger for love and appreciation in this world than for bread. The hunger for love is much more difficult to remove than the hunger for bread.”

Why are we starving for love? In a world that’s live streaming love 24/7 through movies, songs, and social media why are so many begging to be loved? In the last two weeks of this series “Strengthening Your Grip,” we’ve seen there is shaky faith and shallow hope. Shaky faith is when you build on a shaky foundation, when you trust someone or something which is unreliable. Shallow hope is when your soul is anchored to the shifting sands and changing tides of this world. Superficial love is when you try to satisfy your longing for God with something here on earth. We fall in love with an earthly idol. We turn even good things – family, career, pastimes - into gods – something they were not created to be. We expect a person, place or thing to fill our aching hearts in a way only God can. At the same time, we give God the social distance stiff arm. Many today say they are turning away from religion. Actually what they are doing is creating their own religions, DIY religions, when what each of us really needs is not religion but a relationship with the Lord. We need Jesus. We need a love that never lets go. How do you find it?

First, **Draw Near to God with Faith.** The writer of Hebrews says, “Let us draw near to God...” Hebrews 10:22 The Lord is bigger, stronger, higher and deeper than the shifting circumstances which cause you worry, anxiety and despair. The closer you stand to Him the more you stand on solid ground. So how do you draw near to God?

In Bible times this was not possible. The place on earth closest to God was a room in the Jerusalem Temple called The Most Holy Place. In Old Testament days it was where the Ark of the Covenant sat. In both Old and New Testament times it was the place where God’s presence touched the earth. A curtain covered the opening to the Most Holy Place. Only priests could go in the Temple and only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place on one day of the year – the Day of Atonement – Yom Kippur. On that day, the High Priest entered to offer sacrifices to wipe away sin and reunite God and His people – to make them At-One with each other.

Why all this separation between us and God? The virus of sin. It infects everything we do. It spreads everywhere we go. No mask, hand washing or social distancing can stop it. Sin is what we do against God. Sin is how we reject God. Sin is the way we refuse God’s love and wound God’s heart. The priests, the Temple and the sacrifices were the method for cleansing sin but it only treated the symptoms of sin. Since the inner virus causes us to keep sinning, these methods needed to be constantly repeated. Every year the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place to establish atonement for another year.

We now know the coronavirus vaccine decreases the effects of the disease not the disease itself. Scientists are still unsure if the shot must be repeated each year like the flu. I’m not casting doubt on the vaccine. I’m very grateful for the shot. I’m simply pointing out the endless sacrifices in the Temple did not permanently destroy sin and draw us near to God. Our DIY religions don’t destroy the virus of sin. We need Someone to eradicate and purify us from the disease of sin once and for all. The only solid Foundation for our Faith is Jesus. Hebrews says,

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God Hebrews 10:19-22

Hebrews says Jesus is the sacrifice which completely cleanses our sin, He is the curtain through which we enter the Most Holy Place, He is even the High Priest who performs the Atonement. Only a human should do this, only God could do this – Jesus is both. His death and resurrection are the once and done shot which wipes away sin for all time. Because of what Jesus our High Priest and Sacrifice did, we can do what no person could ever do before – we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place not on earth but in heaven.

The word *confidence* means we can boldly enter, fearlessly enter, cheerfully enter, freely enter and draw near to God. Borrowing from Star Trek: “We can boldly go where One Person (Jesus) has gone before.”

How do we draw near to God? With Faith. Hebrews says,

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Hebrews 10:22

Do-it-yourself religion does not work. Faith in Jesus is the only way to enter the Most Holy Place. Don't let fear, pride or guilt hold you back. Draw near to God by Faith in Jesus.

Second, **Hold On to God with Hope.** Hebrews says, “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful” Hebrews 10:23. When we use the word Hope we mean a wish. I hope you will take out the garbage. I hope you will do your homework. I hope Michigan finally beats Ohio State (I'm not very hopeful on that one). In the Bible, Hope is not a wish. Hope is a solid guarantee of something that will happen. God made a promise He will be with us in this life and we will be with Him in the next life. This solid promise He signed not with ink but with His blood. And Hebrews says He is faithful which means He always keeps His promises. He proved He can raise us from the dead by rising from the dead Himself.

Now please notice what He is not promising. He is not guaranteeing everyone will be healed. He is not pledging there will be no war, famine, racism, poverty or pandemic. He is not assuring there will be no sin, sickness or suffering. He is promising He will be with you in all these struggles, He will work through you to overcome these troubles and, most importantly, He is promising these are temporary. They are not eternal. They are not the last word. That especially includes death. We hold onto the Hope that death will one day be decisively defeated.

Why is this crucial? I can count more than thirty families in our Woodside community who've lost a loved one since March 2020 – most of them not from covid. I've offered comfort through phone calls, prayed at bedsides, visited in hospitals and hospices, performed funerals and said goodbye at grave sites. Every family had hope their loved one would be healed and survive. That is what we prayed for. Yet if that is all they hoped for, their hope was empty. Our Hope tells us death is a temporary parting, a momentary separation. The Hope we profess says we will see our loved ones again in our Father's House. The Hope we believe is we will gather for the greatest family reunion of all. Why is it so great? Nobody will ever have to say goodbye again. A grieving daughter said to me during one phone call, “I don't know how people without faith and hope get through this.” Hold on to Faith in God. Hold on to the Hope that one day you will be with God. Then you will have Hope God is with you in your struggles. So what do we do in the meantime?

Third, **Stir Up One Another to Love.** Hebrews says,

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

Hebrews tells me I should give you a gentle shove toward love. Jesus is standing with open arms. Yet we keep Him at arms' length. We give Him the socially distance stiff arm. Maybe you've been hurt or betrayed by someone who was supposed to love you and you dare not take a chance and be wounded again. Maybe you're not ready to put down your idol or addiction even though it's killing you. Maybe you are so shrouded

in shame and guilt you can't believe Jesus or anyone would love you. Maybe you're angry at the way you've been treated and you might as well blame God.

Today, I invite you to take a risk. To take a step. To drop your defenses and let yourself be loved by God. Let Jesus embrace you and hold you. He came from heaven to be with you. He laid down His life to free you. He's preparing a place in His Father's house for you. Let Him love you. Let Him hold you. Let Him love you with a love that never lets go.

Once you live in that love, you start to give that love. Start living heaven's love here on earth. Invite others to receive heaven's love here on earth. How do we do this? Together. Hebrews says, 'Do not give up meeting together, as some are in habit of doing, but encourage one another and all the more as you look forward to Jesus' return.' Over the last 21 months people have gotten out of the habit of meeting together for worship, for Growth Groups, for missions. Now more than ever we need to meet together. Why? We receive and remember God's love best when we are together. Now more than ever we need to read and study the Word of God together. Now more than ever we need to encourage and build each other up. Now more than ever we need to help each other hold on to the faith and hope of Jesus. Make a commitment to gather together with others for worship during Advent and Christmas. Our message series, Welcome the Child, will focus on the stories of those who welcomed the Christ Child and received His love. Make a commitment to attend worship on Christmas Eve and to invite three people to join you. Make a commitment to love abandoned and orphaned children in Zambia through a gift to our Welcome the Child Christmas offering. Above all, this Christmas, take a courageous, fearless, risk to let Jesus love you with a love that never lets go. And then pass it on.

Remember Ken Davis? He was sitting with a mouthful of spaghetti in that Italian restaurant after he gave his talk. In his hand was a card bearing the name of the one person whose love he wanted most in the world – his daughter Tracy Lynn Davis. And he was terrified. He was afraid to turn that card over and see what his daughter wrote about him.

I've jumped out of an airplane at 8,000 feet. I love driving fast cars. I have an airplane. There is a guide in Alaska who said he'll never fly again after riding with me. I love danger, but I couldn't turn the card over.

There's only one thing worse than knowing that wound exists. That's taking the chance someone will rip it open even more widely. Finally I just turned the card over. Written on the other side in huge round letters were these words: "I love my daddy."

I spit spaghetti all over the table.

I was so embarrassed that I ran from the room and found a little bathroom and closed the door. There was a latch. I can still see it. I slammed that latch shut, and I cried like a child. I said, "Oh Jesus, she loves me."

I didn't know there was a guy in there.<sup>1</sup>

Let Jesus love you with a love that never lets go.

Then tell your Daddy you love Him.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ken Davis is president of *Dynamic Communications International*, Arvada, Colorado, and author of *Secrets of Dynamic Communication* (Zondervan, 1991)