

Standing on the Promises

Let us begin with the definition of *promise* from The Merriam-Webster Dictionary: “a declaration that one will do, or refrain from doing, something specified; a legally binding declaration that gives the person to whom it is made a right to expect or to claim the performance or forbearance of a specified act.”

All of us have had promises made to us throughout our lives. The list of promises may include loyalty, possessions, love, assistance, or something else.

But what about the promises of God? How do we define the promises from Him? I love the definition given by James MacDonald in his book, “Always True.” He writes: “A promise is the assurance that God gives to His people so they can walk by faith while they wait for Him to work.” D.L. Moody has added: “God never made a promise that was too good to be true.” Bottom line: “God never over-promises and He never under-delivers.”

Here are some important notes for each of us concerning the promises of God:

- 1. Be willing to accept all God’s promises, not just the ones you like.** For example, Jesus tells us, “**Take heart! I have overcome the world**” (**John 16:33**). We willingly accept this promise because it means we can make it through any challenge. However, just prior to this promise we read another promise which states, “**In this world you will have trouble**” (**John 16:33**). Admittedly, this promise of difficulty and suffering is more challenging for us to accept.
- 2. The ultimate purpose of God’s promises is to bring glory to Himself.** The Psalmist said, “**Fulfill Your promise to Your servant, so that You may be feared**” (**Psalms 119:30**). The word “feared” means to honor, glorify, or worship. This means we cannot simply claim these promises, without first worshipping Him and desiring to give Him the praise only He deserves.
- 3. Be sure to put the promise in their full context.** If you are like me, you find great comfort in this amazing promise of God, “. . . **Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you**” (**Hebrews 13:5b**). I need this assurance in my life. But seldom do we state the beginning part of this verse, which says, “**Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has**

said . . .” (**Hebrews 13:5a**). Because of the promise of God’s presence, I can live free from the love of money and be more content with what I have.

- 4. Some promises are conditional.** If I/we, then God will. God will do His part when we do ours. “If you carefully observe all these commands I am giving you to follow—to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to Him and to hold fast to Him. .” (**Deut. 11:22**). This is my/our responsibility. And when I hold up my/our end, “...then the Lord will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations larger and stronger than you” (**Deuteronomy 11:23**). Another example where we are challenged is, “Humble yourselves before the Lord...” And when we follow this command, we then find, “God will lift you up” (**James 4:10**). We must be obedient for God to fulfill His promise.
- 5. Promises must be taken and then applied by faith.** We should not view promises as, ‘they might be for me,’ but instead should take them as our own. God’s promises are to be grabbed hold of and used in an attitude of faith.

You may remember when Jesus returned to His hometown of Nazareth and taught in the synagogue. Matthew tells us that everyone was amazed, wondering, “Where does He get this wisdom and power to do miracles” (**Matthew 13:54**). They then began to disparage His family, leading them to doubt Jesus could be whom He claimed to be. “And they were deeply offended and refused to believe in Him” (**Matthew 13:57**). Those in Jesus’ hometown refused to grasp His promise of miracles, so He ended up only doing a few, we are told, “because of their unbelief” (**Matthew 13:58**).

We see this principle played out in the Book of Joshua, where we read, “So the Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers” (**Joshua 21:43a**). The promise of land was given to them but they had to take possession of the promise to make it their own. That is exactly what they did. Joshua continues, “. . . and they took possession of it and settled there” (**Joshua 21:43b**). Let us not be like the people mentioned by the Psalmist, “Then they despised the pleasant land; they did not believe his promise” (**Psalms 106:24**).

- 6. Make certain you are ready to receive God’s promises.** In **1 Samuel 2**, God is letting the tribe of Levi know He is removing them and will instead pour out His blessings on the remaining tribes. He says it this way, “I will honor those who honor Me, and I will despise those who think lightly of Me” (**1 Samuel 2:30b**).

Listen, God is looking for individuals who have surrendered hearts and are quick to confess sin. The psalmist says clearly, “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and has heard my

prayer. Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld His love from me” (Psalm 66:18-20).

A final note concerning the promises of God:

7. **Hold to hope.** Paul challenged us this way, “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10:23-24).

Sometimes the wait is long before a promise is fulfilled in our lives. Do not give up. God remains faithful to do what He said He would do. That is the encouragement Paul provides when he says, “You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised” (Hebrews 10:36).

Remember James McDonald’s definition mentioned earlier: “A promise is the assurance that God gives to His people so they can walk by faith while they wait for Him to work.”

God’s entire communication with us can be put into two words: “I Promise.” In a world of broken promises, God can be counted on. We do not have to worry if He will make good on what He has promised because He never over-promises and He never under-delivers!