

The Power of a Promise

by Bayless Conley

Copyright © Answers with Bayless Conley

Hello, friend. Thank you for joining us today. I'm going to be talking to you about something that is absolutely central to our faith, central to Christian living, central to pleasing God, and it's going to help you. So, I hope that you are ready. If you got a Bible, why don't you grab it? We're going to sit down together. We're going to get into His Word.

I'm going to begin by reading a verse to you from Joshua 23. Joshua is an old man. He's ready to die. He's finished his race. And he gathers the leaders of Israel around him, and he says something that is so profound. This is Joshua 23:14 NKJV. He said,

¹⁴ "Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth."

In other words, I'm going to die.

"And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed.

My friend, God's Word can be trusted. His promises can be relied upon. We used to sing an old hymn, "Standing on the promises of God. Standing on the promises of Christ, my King." My friend, His Word will hold you up.

I remember years ago reading a story about this guy. He moved up into the northeastern part of the United States. He was not used to the severe winters there. He went down to a lake that had frozen over. This is a whole new territory for him. He was raised in the southern part of our nation and never had winters like this. And he's thinking, "Should I venture out on the ice?" Just gingerly, he puts a foot on that frozen lake and then sort of draws it back. And then begins to just inch out. Just afraid at any moment that the ice is going to crack and he's going to fall through it. He ventures out maybe five, six, seven feet onto the lake, and he is just ready, just far enough that he can dive back if it starts to crack.

All of a sudden, he hears this terrible crunching noise. And he looked over to his side, and it was a road that emptied out onto the lake. And a truck filled with wood in the back, it was just stacked up with cords of wood in the back of this flatbed truck, rolled out on the lake and drove across the lake. And went up a road on the other side. He thought, "Oh my gosh. Here I was afraid that this ice couldn't hold me up, and it held up that truck that weighed thousands and thousands of pounds." My friend, you can venture out. You can stand upon the promises of God. They will hold you up.

The Book of Titus says, "God who cannot lie, promised." The only purpose of a promise is its fulfillment. In the Book of Hebrews, the 11th chapter, it says, "By faith that they obtained promises." The promises are there, but they need to be obtained. We need to set ourselves in agreement with God's Word. Amos 3:3, "How can two walk together except they be agreed, or unless they be agreed?"

The Power of a Promise

We have to agree with God's Word. Whether we can understand how a promise could ever come to pass, whether we could work out in our own mind how God could work things out, that matters not. Friend, the creator of the universe can bring His Word to pass. There is nothing too difficult for Him. The promises are obtained by faith. Faith basically is, we just act like God is an honest being. We act upon His Word. If my wife says, "Sweetheart, let's have lunch today. I'm going to meet you at 11:45 at such and such a restaurant." I don't worry about it after that point. I don't keep calling up, "Are you sure you're going to be there? Are you sure you're going to be there?" No. I just make a little note of it. And I drive, and I'm there at 11:45. Why? Because my wife told me she'd meet me there.

I never worry about it. I don't fret about it. Friend, if God says something in His Word, I just accept it. I don't have to have proof. I don't have to have signs. Just His Word is enough evidence. I want to encourage you to become familiar with the promises of God. The truth is, there is a promise that covers your specific area of need. I know there's somebody watching me right now; you are faced with a titanic situation, and you don't know what to do. I guarantee you; God has a promise for you. You need to find it. You need to feed upon it. You need to get it on the inside of you and put your trust in His promises.

That is the way we put our trust in God, by putting our trust in His Word. Find a promise that covers your situation. Read it in its context. Cross-reference it. Become familiar with it. Remember, God, who cannot lie, promised. I was teaching in our Bible school many years ago. This particular class was on the subject of divine healing. There was a young woman that had become a member of our church. She was very gifted musically. She played with the band, and they had band practice every Wednesday night. We had classes that you could go to for the school on Tuesday night and Thursday night.

On Tuesday night, I'm teaching a class on divine healing. She's a good Christian girl. She was raised in a good solid Christian home. But the particular church she went to in that denomination, though they did thoroughly believe in salvation and forgiveness, she had never heard a single message on the subject of healing. She didn't know anything in the Bible about God being a healer or about any promises of God being a healer. She was just told, "Well, all that stuff passed away."

Let me tell you something. What God is by nature is not dispensational, meaning it does not pass away. When God says "I am" something, He's talking about His nature. When Jesus said, "I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life," He's talking about His nature. His nature is life. When God says in Exodus 15, I believe verse 26, "I am Jehovah Rapha. I am the Lord who heals you. I am the Lord, Your physician." God's nature is healing. That means it didn't pass away when one era ended and another era started.

What God is by nature, He always is. Healing is available because God is a healing God. In addition to that, the Scriptures are full of promises of healing, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. You don't have to look far to find them. Anyway, I'm teaching, and she's sitting in class. She's never heard anything like this before. She starts thinking, "What have I gotten myself into?" Rather than just reject it, she was like the Bereans. She daily studied the Scriptures to see whether these things were so.

Every Tuesday night, she would go home, and after hearing one of the lessons I would teach, she would read the verses that I'd given in their context. She'd read the whole chapter. She'd cross-reference it, just studied as good as she could. And she came Tuesday night, after

The Power of a Promise

Tuesday night, after Tuesday night, after Tuesday night. She would go home sometimes into the wee hours of the morning and study those promises. It was important to her because she had a large tumor growing in her throat. We didn't know about this until afterward, but it was of particular interest to her because of this large tumor that was growing.

After about a month and a half of looking at these promises, feeding upon them, digesting them—I had an old man tell me one time, said, “Bayless, the greatest problem in the Church today is undigested theology.” I think there's a lot of truth to that. We need to digest God's Word. Get it from our heads into our hearts. That only comes as we pay attention.

In Proverbs 4, God says, “Hey, give heed to My Word. Don't let it depart from your eyes. Give ear to My Word. Keep it in the midst of your heart because it's life to those that find it and it's health, the Hebrew word is medicine, to all their flesh.” We've got to keep it in the midst of our heart. We've got to keep it before our eyes. We've got to put it in our ears. That is the way that His Word is digested.

So she's been digesting the Word for a month and a half. Early, early on a Wednesday morning, she'd been up most of the night studying. She came to the conclusion—and she told me the story afterward—she said, “I just said out loud. God, I believe this. This is in the Scriptures. This promise is for me.” She said, “God, I ask You to heal me right now.” I don't remember what specific promise she was quoting at the moment. Maybe she was speaking of the whole body of promises that we've been studying in the classes and that she'd been pouring over. But she embraced it.

She said, “God, I believe this right now. I just thank You for touching me in the mighty name of Jesus.” She got a few hours of sleep. I think it was a Wednesday night service the next night. She's on her way to Wednesday night service, and she's driving to get there. She's going to be playing piano that night. She starts on the way to church. She's getting this tickling feeling in her throat. She pulls off at the side of the road in front of some stranger's house and starts to cough. And she coughed up the tumor in her hand. Rolled down the window, threw it out into the people's yard, rolled the window up, came onto church, and told everyone the story.

She got checked out medically, and the tumor was gone. She was healed. What did that? It was the power of a promise. A promise that was embraced. A promise that was acted upon. There's the most intriguing story in Acts 12, and I want to begin reading to you. I want to begin reading it to you in verses 1-7 NKJV. It says,

¹ Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. ² Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

That means that he beheaded James. James was one of the 12 apostles.

³ And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. ⁴ So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover.

Meaning he's going to bring him out, and he's going to execute him the same way that he has executed James.

The Power of a Promise

⁵ Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. ⁶ And when Herod was about to bring him out.

Herod is going to bring Peter out. Meaning he's going to bring him out for execution to be beheaded by the sword as well. That night Peter was praying? Peter was crying out to God? Peter was worried? No. It says,

⁶ That night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. ⁷ Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, "Arise quickly!" And his chains fell off his hands.

There was a bit of a cosmic prison break that took place there. I want you to think about it. The eve of his execution, the Church is praying. Peter's sleeping. He's sleeping so soundly that the angel has to kick him in the side to wake him up. "Peter, how can you be sleeping when they're sharpening the axe to take off your head?" I'll tell you one reason, certainly because the Church is praying, and God answers prayer. Truthfully, there's not a record that the Church prayed at all when James was arrested. Maybe, he's larger than life, and they think nothing can happen to him, and they didn't pray. This time they prayed, and certainly, that factored into it.

But I'll tell you something else that factored into it is that Peter had a promise. The end of John's Gospel, John 21:18, Jesus is talking to Peter, and this is just prior to Jesus' ascension. He's gathered with the disciples there, and in particular, He says this to Peter, verses 18-19 of John 21 NKJV,

¹⁸ "Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." ¹⁹ This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me."

Jesus has told Peter the manner in which he's going to die, what's going to happen just prior to his death, and He says, "It's going to happen when you're old." You know what? When Peter's locked up here in prison, and Herod is having the axe sharpened, Peter is not old. This did not necessarily describe what Jesus said. So Peter says, "Hey, I'm not old. I got a promise from Jesus. Why should I worry? I don't even need to pray. I have a promise." He just rested. That was his way to respond to the promise.

I'm sitting in a building right now that houses our church. We've got several auditoriums on the campus here. A big children's facility. We've got a lot of outside stuff on the plaza. We have a beautiful church campus here. It was a pretty big struggle to get here. We had found a property, but it was owned by four different people. These four different parcels, they were all contiguous, they all joined, but four different people owned them that lived in different parts of the country.

I go to the city to find out what these parcels are zoned. And the underlying zoning, it all allowed a church. I thought, "Great!" We contacted the owners. Everybody thought it was impossible. The people of the city, when they found out what I was doing, they just said, "Well, good luck, it's not going to happen. There's no way you're going to get these four people to sell it, even though it does have a zoning that would allow you to build a church there."

The Power of a Promise

We work on it for a year. And by God's grace, we got all four of the owners to agree to sell. We buy the property. Altogether it was about 18 acres when you joined all of the pieces. We were just elated. Then we worked for another solid year on plans. I worked fairly closely with certain individuals within the city, and we got all of the plans done to turn them in to get our permits in order to build. Three days after we turned those plans in, I get a letter from the city. Saying that they are going to take our property from us. That we immediately need to turn it over to them. Or they will enact eminent domain, lock us out of our property, and seize it from us. It was the beginning of a big battle.

They did indeed lock us out of our property. They enacted eminent domain. And the purpose of eminent domain is, if a reservoir has to go in, if a major highway has to come through, something that benefits the population in the area in the town, then the owner of said property needs to sell it to the city. They enact eminent domain, and they're paid fair market value for the property. There wasn't a reservoir coming in. There wasn't a highway coming through. It was a big box retailer. If I mentioned the name of it, 90% of you would know it. It is certainly known throughout the United States here.

They had come to some people in the city, said, "We want the property that that church has. They may have done all the work, they may have spent several years, but we want the property." They took it away from us in order to give it to a big box retailer. Had nothing to do with the use of eminent domain. We found out later this was happening across our country. Properties of churches were being seized and given over to business people that, in some cases, I'm sure, were greasing the palms of some of those people that were in what's called the redevelopment agency.

Which in our case is just city council people. They would put on their redevelopment agency cap, and they were accountable to no one. No one voted. No one had any access to the meetings that they had. They put on their redevelopment cap and said, "Yes, we're going to do this." And so we were in court for years. In fact, it was a battle that they didn't expect.

And it was not friendly at all. We were in court for probably about five years, and the local paper just slaughtered us every day. There were articles about our church, sometimes about me. There were political cartoons with my face on it with a devil's tail and devil's horns. They just treated us very unkindly, very unfairly. For a long time, major news agencies were showing up at our church. ABC, NBC, CBS, those are news agencies in our country here. It depends on where you are. You may not know who they are.

There were articles done in the New York Times in the LA Times across our country about the battle that was going on. It was found out that a particular retailer was working behind the scenes, trying to take our property. In the midst of this battle, and it's interesting, we had a couple of law firms that were just great on our side that we used.

One of them, when we began, I just told them, I said, "Look, I expect you to do the best you can do, but our trust is not in you. And you just need to know that upfront. Our trust is in God alone. We're preparing the horse for the day of battle, but victory comes from God. We hope that He uses you, but our trust isn't in you." They said, "Okay, we're going to take it. But you need to understand no one in your position in the history of our country has ever won such a case. Statistically, your chances of winning this are zero." Says, "We'll take it as long as you understand this." I said, "We understand. Go for it."

The Power of a Promise

Anyway, we ended up in Federal Court, which is just one step below the Supreme Court. And the Federal Court Judge, after hearing the cases argued on both sides—there were five main counts in all the lawsuits and things that were going on—we won hands down every one of those different counts. We won. The judge ruled in our favor straight across the board. Anyway, long story short, we ended up with more acreage than we started with. We're on a 33—34-acre campus now. There are some miracles that went in there. We have this beautiful church campus. But from the day we engaged that original 18 acres until the day we finally built and could move in, it was nine years.

Bit of a roller coaster throughout and a lot of prayer throughout, but here we are because of the grace and the goodness of God. I shared all of that story just to give a bit of a backdrop. Because about halfway through our legal struggles, we've been battling in court and just getting this horrible press from the media. They regularly printed misinformation and lies about us. About halfway through, I had a dream from God. And it was the particular gentleman in the dream, he was the one that was spearheading the seizure of our property. He was, call him the ringleader or whatever.

He was the main one that was behind this and got all the other council members to rally and had struck the deal with this big box retailer. I had a dream. In the dream, I walked into a room, and he was standing behind a table. And the table was slanted like this. He was at the upper end of the table. He looked at me and said, "Do you want to arm wrestle?" He's got the advantage. He's on the top part of the table. I'm down here, and he's up here, so he's definitely got the advantage.

I said, "Sure." I took his hand, and we arm wrestled. And easily, I just went, and I beat him. He said, "Do you want to do it again?" I said, "Sure." I took his arm. And it looks like he's got the complete advantage, no way I can win. And I beat him, and then I woke up. I immediately thought about the dreams that Pharaoh had that were interpreted by Joseph. Joseph said, "Look, the two dreams are one. And God showed you the thing twice because it's established. It is firmly established by God. You can put your trust in it. This is going to come to pass." I thought immediately about that. That God had shown me the dream twice because it was done. We were going to win.

Now, that was in the middle of the struggle. From that day forward, I never prayed again. Now, the church prayed. There were all sorts of prayer meetings. I didn't tell anybody about my dream, but I just rested. I knew we were going to win. It seemed like everything was stacked against us. It seemed impossible that we could win, but God sustained us. He sustained us financially throughout. He sustained us with the fact that the church continued to grow and stay solid throughout, even though we got so much negative press. It was terrible. They just roasted us again, and again, and again. Not for weeks, not for months, but for years. But we won.

I rested because I had a promise. Now listen, the promise does not guarantee that there will not be problems. No, friend, there will be problems. The promise gives us the ability to look through the problem to the predicted outcome. The Apostle Paul in Acts chapter, I believe it's 27. Yes, Acts 27. He's in a great storm on the ship. They hadn't seen the sun, stars, or moon for many days. All hope that they would be saved was lost. An angel appears to him and brings him a promise from God.

He gathers the people around him. Listen, the lightning is still flashing. The thunder is sounding like cannons on every side of them. The rain is falling in sheets. The wind is still howling. Nothing has changed. Paul said, "Listen, I have a promise from God, and I believe that it

The Power of a Promise

will be just as it was told to me.” A promise. He says, “We’re going to lose the ship, but we’re not going to lose our lives. We’re going to run aground on an island. We’re all going to be safe.” It happened exactly that way. God’s promise came to pass.

The dictionary defines a promise as grounds for feeling hopeful about the future. I’ve got a lot more I could say about this, but let me just remind you of something. Jesus, prior to His arrest, His mock trial, His beating, and His crucifixion, He’s gathered together with the disciples on the eve of His arrest. What’s He doing? It says they were singing praises. Jesus, how can You do that? He knows He’s going to be put through a mock trial. He knows that He’s going to be lied about and slandered. He knows He’s going to be beaten without mercy. He knows He’ll be crucified, but He also knows the promises.

He knows Psalm 16:10, a prophecy about Him. A promise about Him says, “You will not leave My soul in Sheol or in hell. You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.” Jesus Himself said, “As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Just like Jonah came up, Jesus came up.

He knew there was going to be a resurrection. He knew that God had spoken the words in Genesis to the woman and said, “Your seed, the serpent is going to bruise His heel, but He’s going to crush the serpent’s head.” Jesus knew that mankind’s redemption would be won, that the serpent’s head would be crushed, that He would be raised from the dead victorious, He had a promise. So what is He doing on the eve of His passion and suffering? He’s singing praises.

Friend, if you got a promise, you can sing praises. You can anchor your trust in the promises of God. You can rest in His promises. I just wanted to tell you; there is power in the promise. This book is filled with promises. Have a love affair with your Bible. Here’s one for you. “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” My friend that is you. You call on the name of Jesus today, and He will not turn you away. He will come to you. He will change your life. He’ll give you a fresh hope. I hope you join us next time. Until then, God bless you.

Copyright © Answers with Bayless Conley