

## Sermon: More Than A Promise

**Text: Acts 18:18; Ecclesiastes 5:1-7; Numbers 6:1-21**

### Introduction:

Promises are an essential component in all human relationships. A promise is a commitment to follow through on your word. But what does it mean when you say the phrase, “I promise...” and how does this affect your relationships?

### “I promise...”

We have all heard this phrase time and time again. Regardless if it's a promise for something small like to wash the dishes or something big like to quit doing a destructive behavior—promises reinforce the integrity in relationships and help you get closer to those you love. Studies suggest that failing to keep promises holds a tremendous amount of emotional value. When we break promises—we break trust. These seeds of distrust and hurt can be carried throughout our entire lives.

Here are several things to remember when thinking about the importance of promises:

**1. Promises are hard work**

If following through on a promise was easy, then broken promises wouldn't hurt so much. Promises are usually hard because they require us to step outside of our wants and fulfill something for someone else or challenge ourselves to break old harmful habits.

**2. Promises are meant to be taken seriously**

Do you remember the first time someone broke a promise to you? When a promise is broken, your reputations, relationships and personal integrity suffer. Take each promise you make seriously.

**3. Promises are commitments**

Whether the commitment is to yourself or to someone else, making a promise is a commitment that you will keep your word. It is a commitment that reinforces trust.

**4. Promises aren't just what you do for others**

Fulfilling promises to yourself—to do better or be better—is just as important as following through on your promises to others. When you make a promise to yourself, you are taking the time to work towards improving your life.

Promises are a vital part of building relationships with others. But they are also a very important aspect in our relationship with God. When we “believe” in Jesus—we are making a promise to God. When we walk in faith, we are putting the promise to trust God into action in our daily lives.

- As you look back over your life—what promises have you made to God?
- How important is it that we make good on our promises to God?
- How do you believe God responds to our broken promises?
- What is the difference between a vow, a covenant, and a promise?

### Examination:

- Read **Ecclesiastes 5:1-7**
  - We all love **John 3:16**. It's a verse that affirms God's great love for us—as well as the forgiveness and eternal life that we receive when we put our faith in Christ. The verse can cause us to think of a gracious grandfather that treats us with compassion and mercy. Do you agree? Is that true for you?
  - **Ecclesiastes 5:1** is a completely different kind of a verse—one that might cause us to see God our Father in a different light. What is your view of God when you think about this verse?
  - What do you think it means to guard your steps when approaching God?
  - How often to you go near to God to listen? Why should our words be few? What do you think it means to be “quick with our mouth” when spending time in the presence of God?
  - Why is it better NOT to make a vow (or a promise) to God, rather than making a vow and not fulfilling it?
  - Can you think of any times that you, personally, have made a vow to God?
  - Verse 6 asks a question: “Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands?” Is this a question directed at us? How would you answer this question?
  - Why do you think this passage concludes with the words of verse 7—mentioning much dreaming and many words? How does this connect with our tendency to say things to God that we don't mean?
  - What does it mean to fear God? How can this be misunderstood?
  
- Read **Numbers 6:1-21**
  - These verses describe the process of making a special, voluntary vow to God called the “Nazarite Vow.” Why might someone WANT to make this vow? What is the purpose of it?
  - What are the requirements of taking this vow? What is the person required to do or not do?
  - Is there any mention of the length or duration of the vow?
  - What does it mean to be “consecrated to the Lord”? (v. 8)
  - What is done to conclude the vow?
  - What do you suppose is the symbolism of burning the hair at the temple?
  
- Read **Acts 18:18**
  - Paul has now concluded 18 months of very fruitful ministry in the city of Corinth. God promised to protect Paul, which is exactly what happened. At some point during his time in Corinth (I'm guess after Gallio ruled in his favor), Paul made a vow to God that included not cutting his hair. From what you just read in Numbers 6, do you believe this was a Nazarite Vow? Why or why not?
  - What do you think Paul's MOTIVE was for making this vow?

### **Application:**

What vows have you made to God that you need to be reminded of and recommitted to? Is there a vow you might make to God today—perhaps out of gratitude or recommitment?