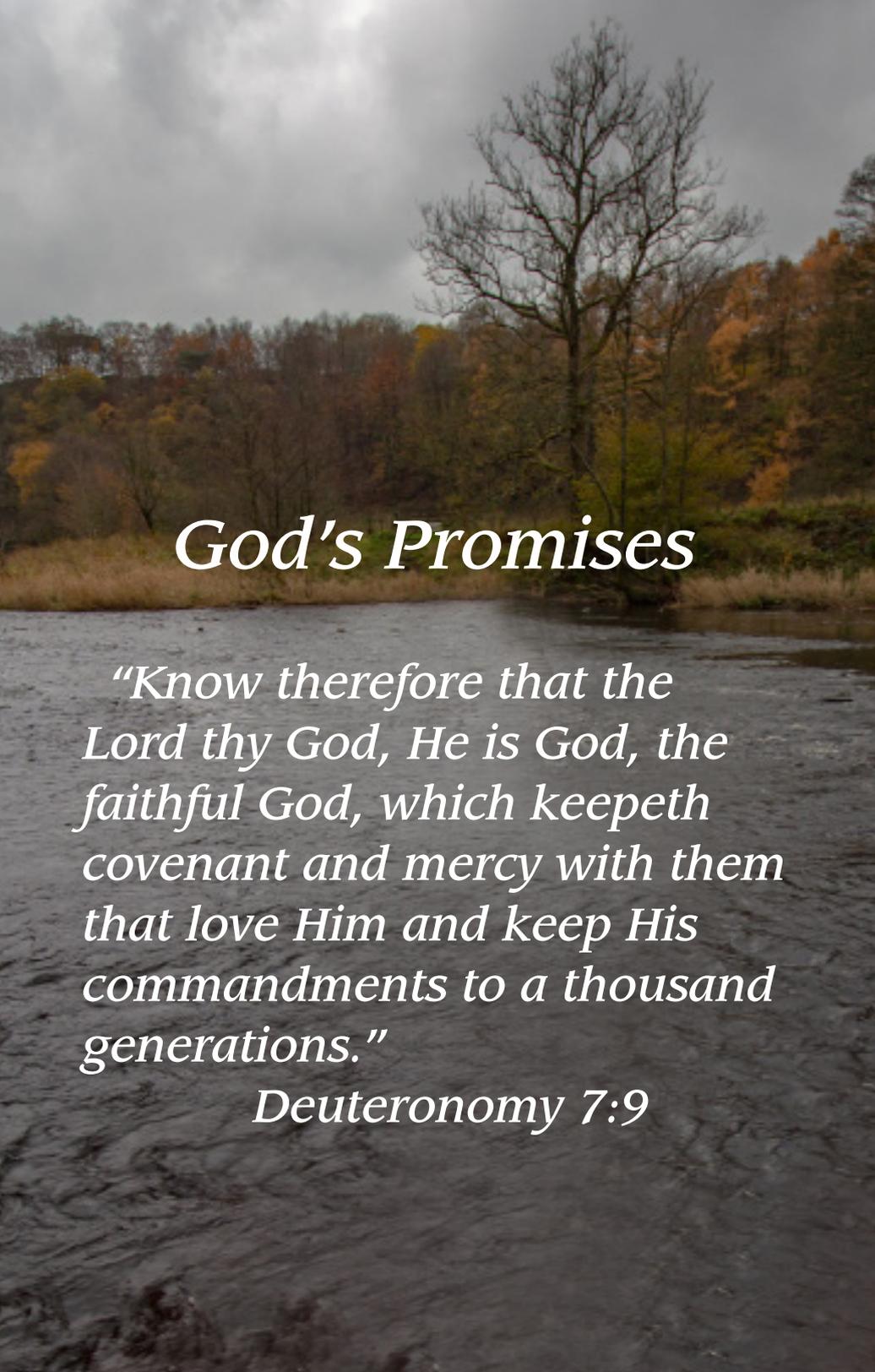


Faithfulness In Kingdom Work



A landscape photograph featuring a wide river in the foreground with dark, rippling water. The middle ground is filled with trees, some with vibrant autumn foliage in shades of orange and yellow, and others that are bare. The background shows a line of trees under a heavy, grey, overcast sky. The overall mood is somber and reflective.

God's Promises

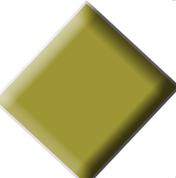
“Know therefore that the Lord thy God, He is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations.”

Deuteronomy 7:9

A promise is a declaration or a commitment. We have all heard the rebellious phrase: "Rules were made to be broken." In today's world of selfishness and deception, it seems that "Promises are made to be broken." Someone's word is not as trustworthy as we wish it were. In our own lives, we experience broken promises—maybe not intentional, but it happens. We break promises due to plans not working out, forgetfulness, or something out of our control. But...we *can* trust the promises of God!

The psalmist David wrote, "The LORD is faithful in all his words and kind in all his works" (Psalm 145:13b-ESV). And Paul told the Thessalonians, "Faithful is He that called you, who also will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24-ESV). I have experienced this in my life.

We read in God's Word about promises to or about women. Several promises involve having children, and all were fulfilled.



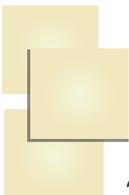
-Sarah in her old age conceived an heir of promise, Isaac.

-Hannah was given her heart's desire, her son, Samuel, whom she gave back to the Lord.

-Elizabeth also in her old age had a son, John, who prepared the way for Christ.

-Mary, a sincere God-follower, was chosen to bring the Messiah into our world.

Reading about promises is encouraging and inspiring. Fulfilled promises by God encourage us to continue in faithfulness, and like you, I have personally experienced fulfilled promises from God.



God Is in Control

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).

God sees the future when we cannot. Raised in a pastor's home my entire life, I acquired a positive perspective of ministry (not perfect, but positive). I love my home church family! Visiting missionaries and their experiences fascinated me.

In high school I felt led into ministry and missions but could not envision what that would look like. Participating in ETEAM and a missions trip to Japan with a lifelong friend assured me more of God's leading. I am a planner; I always have been. Though I wanted to know every step of my future, I had to give God complete control.

I attended Welch College and along with my elementary education courses, I enrolled in several missions classes. I served in elementary and middle school classes with ESL students (English as a Second Language). During one spring break, I participated in a missions trip. At the time, I did not realize how much the cross-cultural experiences and ministering out of my comfort zone would impact my life of ministry. But God knew.

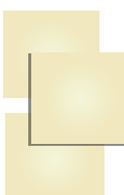
My husband, Josh, attended ABAC, a college in Tifton, Georgia, for one year before attend-

ing Welch. He knew God was calling him to go to Welch even when others thought it didn't make sense. Over ten years later, we understood God's plan for giving Josh a heart and a base in Tifton. He wanted us to plant a church in that city. God saw our future when we couldn't.

Our first ministry was in Homerville, Georgia, Josh's hometown, where he served as youth pastor. We loved our church and community and prayed for God to do BIG things. We did not realize those BIG things would take us across the country.

The Lord spoke to our hearts about planting a new church, and, at the same time, He was moving in the heart of the senior pastor and his wife, Jeff and Heather Goodman. We decided to team up to start The Springs Church in Marana, Arizona. God saw our future and had BIG things planned.

**I have learned and experienced that God is in control.
Look back over your life; where was God at work when you
didn't realize it?**



God Is Always With Us

Israel had rejected God and He was angry with them. In His wrath He destroyed their nation, city, and temple. In chapter 43 the Lord spoke through the prophet to encourage His people. “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walketh through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God” (Isaiah 43:2-3a).

The New King James puts it this way, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you; when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God.” If He encouraged Israel, even when He was angry with them, He will not leave us alone.

Our first experience planting a church in Marana, Arizona, came with triumphs and struggles. Early on we were doing it all ourselves—unloading and setting up, greeting, working

with the children, preaching, tearing down, and packing up. But God did not leave us alone. The Lord sent couples and families to minister with us, sometimes only for a season, but they definitely made an impact.

People far from God came and experienced a life-change through Christ. Hiram came as a teen trying to impress a girl. He professed to be atheist, but eventually started opening his heart. After a couple of years, he gave his life to Jesus and was all in. Less than a year later he felt called into ministry. BIG things from God.

With mentoring by Josh and Jeff and leading by God, Hiram developed into an awesome youth and worship pastor at The Springs. It is amazing to see how much God transformed his life. The Lord was always with us. We gained community and a church family through the people God brought to The Springs. Through family small groups, moms’ Bible studies, and just doing life together, we made bonds that will last a lifetime.

The Springs Church is still

thriving and reaching people for Christ. During those seven years, God shaped us and gave us experiences that have been pivotal in planting Awaken Church. God continued to show that He does not leave us alone.

Church planting is a daunting, difficult call to accept on your own. When God led us to Tifton, Georgia, to plant a new church, we earnestly prayed for teammates. God directed Josh to the Suggs family, quite literally. At the National Convention in 2017, Josh was praying about a teammate as Shane walked by him. Josh had known Shane when they were both youth pastors in Georgia, and Shane had experience in church planting.

Our entire family quickly developed a bond with Shane, Jamie, Grace, and Eden. In Josh and Shane's working relationship, they complement each other with strengths and weaknesses. Jamie and I have developed a close friendship and enjoy serving together. Their girls love our kids like siblings, (or maybe even more). Shane has years of construction experience, which has been vital in the renovations to our new building. He has poured blood, sweat, and tears, literally, into our new facility.

This may seem trivial: we

get along with our teammates. Shane can help with the new building. Jamie and I can share the responsibilities as pastor's wives. But I see it as God fulfilling another promise to work all things out for His purpose. He will not leave us alone in the ministry He has called us to fulfill.

Now we have our Awaken Church family! We are growing in number. We are growing closer to the Lord with salvation decisions, baptisms to publically declare devotion to God, and numerous people serving in our church and in our community sharing God's love. We are growing closer to each other with many involved in small groups.

For me, the best way to see our closeness is through Harper, our youngest. Each Sunday and other times we are together, she is excited to walk around and talk to ladies, men, and teens in our church. They are family to her, too.

We have bonded over our common vision and purpose—to be engaged with the mission of Christ, to reach our community and beyond with the love of Jesus. Through our small groups, our service at church and community events, our co-ed softball team, and just doing

life together, we have become family, and we welcome more people each week to join us.

God Guides Us

“And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them” (Isaiah 42:16). God leads us as we trust in Him.

When I look back over my 35 years, I can see God’s hand guiding me. From early on as a PK (preacher’s kid), God led me into His mission. In college, God led me to my husband and then to growing and raising our children. The Lord guided us to our ministry in Homerville, to the church He planted in Marana, and to our present and future at Awaken Church.

Think back over your own life. No matter how short or long the time you have lived on this earth, can you see God’s plan unfolding?

I am sure you can say like me: Yes, I may have been “blind” through some of His leading. Yes, some of His guidance was through rough places that I did not know or understand. Yet, I can say with confidence that the Lord did not forsake me.

God was always in control. God was always with me. God was always guiding me. He has always fulfilled His promises, and I trust Him to continue. 

Adapted from the Celebration Service at the National Association Convention/2019.

About the Author: Raised in an Illinois pastor’s family, Ashley is married to Josh Bennett and has three children, Sawyer, Finn, and Harper. After spending several years in Arizona co-pastoring The Springs mission church in Marana, Josh and Ashley are currently planting a church in Tifton, Georgia.