



## “Asleep at the Wheel”

*...broken promises and  
apathetic preparation*  
-2 Samuel 21-

**by Pastor Tim Dodson  
at JF Believers Church  
in Menomonie, Wisc  
on March 13, 2019**

Mario Puzo, in the book “The Last Don” spoke of a time when  
*“Actions defined a man; (but) words were a fart in the wind.”*

We are all well aware of the old saying that “words are cheap.” It seems that man finds making promises an easy thing to do and a much harder thing to follow through on. The plethora of evidence to this fact would fill volumes. Broken treaties, broken marriages, and broken contracts. There is of course bankruptcies, unfinished construction projects, and friendships lost. I wish that I could claim that this issue is unique to the unredeemed world, but sadly the church and professed believers are often just as guilty.

What is just as sad, *if not perhaps worse*, is the “aftermath.” It’s hard to come back from a broken promise. It’s as if one stumbled backwards and then is unable to catch their balance. Often what follows is literally *years* of trying to regain one’s footing. *Many* never do. For God, promises are a serious thing. A man’s word is important to God. The book of James and Jesus in Matthew 5 both remind us that we are to simply “*say yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned.*” (James 5:12B, Matthew 5:37) Too many times in our culture, our promise is like saying “unless something better comes along.” Yet the command of the Lord says we should not break our word, period:

*“This is what the LORD commands: When a man makes a vow to the LORD or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything he said.”*

**Numbers 30:1-2**

Years ago when this church began, we had no need of church covenant membership, *or at least we thought!* Over time it became repeatedly evident that people will *say* a lot if it behooves them personally to do so, but to actually expect the integrity of faithfulness is often foolishness on our part. After years of the fall-out of broken promises and lack of loving loyalty, we finally wised up. Much of this is due to attitudes toward the issue of sin. Sin for believers is often something we do not participate in, *until we have a really good reason and then we are mysteriously granted a one-time license or a special dispensation.*

Certainly we know it is an easy thing to *say* we will do something, but often quite another to actually do it. I have lost count of how many folks have come here amongst us and vowed before God and church to live another kind of life, only to be “taken out” in the end by the very “skeleton in their closet”...their personal choice sin, that they came here with way back in the beginning in their back pocket. When we harden our hearts, we no longer hear the voice of God.

So we began a program of Covenant Membership here...not to somehow bind people to a pseudo-legal agreement, but rather to create a vehicle in which to instruct and practice the biblical principles of honesty, integrity, and loyalty. We painted a picture of God's faithfulness to us...the promises He makes, and how He "never lies" for He "cannot lie." A way for us to learn the Godly attribute of being the same "yesterday, today, and forever." Such consistent living is "way beyond rare" these days! The principles of Covenant Membership should be something that is natural in the daily living out of our faith, for it is the very nature of God that we claim lives within us. It is the very core of Christianity. But again, sadly, it is **not** a natural thing, especially in our current social dynamic. A world where it is "every man for himself."

Years before ...back in Joshua 9, soon after Israel had entered into the Promised Land, we read of the original account of the Gibeonites. The whole incident was based on a ruse by the Gibeonites against Israel in order to keep from being killed. Yet despite the deception behind that account, a promise was made by God's children, and an agreement was garnered. And God essentially said "*a promise is a promise.*" *You made a deal and you will now adhere to that accord and will do so forever.* God expects us to fulfill our obligations. Volunteer work, job, church, marriage, home mortgage, etc., we should live up to our word. In many circles today, the breaking of an oath is just standard business practice and worldly status quo—but before God, it is **simply sin.**

*God is not a man, so he does not lie. He is not human, so he does not change his mind.  
Has he ever spoken and failed to act? Has he ever promised and not carried it through?*  
Numbers 23:19

Saul moved upon the Gibeonites in the midst of highly charged personal emotion. He let his emotions rule the day instead of his head and heart. (in that order!) And while the world had seemed to have forgotten the initial promise concerning the Gibeonites as well as the breaking of such, **God did not.** God's heart on this matter was laid open for man to see in Leviticus 6:1-5 *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Suppose one of you sins against your associate and is unfaithful to the LORD. Suppose you cheat in a deal involving a security deposit, or you steal or commit fraud, or you find lost property and lie about it, or you lie while swearing to tell the truth, or you commit any other such sin. If you have sinned in any of these ways, you are guilty. You must give back whatever you stole, or the money you took by extortion, or the security deposit, or the lost property you found, or anything obtained by swearing falsely. You must make restitution by paying the full price plus an additional 20 percent to the person you have harmed. On the same day you must present a guilt offering."* Generally when we "after-the-fact" come to our senses and realize our actions, we usually send up a little glib apology to God, and then slink off to live the rest of our spiritual lives in the back pew of some "easy-jesus" church...having never repented to the one we sinned against or ever attempting to make things right. This is not acceptable to God. When we fail to repent to the one or ones we sinned against and try to make things right, we are excusing ourselves, which is simply a repeat of the sin that got us into trouble to begin with. Psalms 66:18 tells us that "*If I harbor sin in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.*"

Sometimes keeping that promise is frankly a very difficult and uncomfortable thing to do. But the truth is, our living reflects upon King and kingdom. When we make an open decision to sin, then the unsaved world sees the hypocrisy and dishonesty and such brings shame upon the name of Christ. **Restitution** is a biblical concept, and it's consistent throughout the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, for example, we're told that, "*A thief must certainly make restitution, but if he has nothing, he must be sold to pay for his theft. If the stolen animal is found alive in his possession ... he must pay back double. If a man grazes his livestock in a field or vineyard and lets them stray and they graze in another man's field, he must make restitution from the best of his own field or vineyard. If a fire breaks out and spreads into thorn bushes so that it burns shocks of grain or standing grain or the whole field, the one who started the fire must make restitution. . . If a man borrows an animal from his neighbor and it is injured or dies . . . he must make restitution*" (Exodus 22:1-14) In many

ways, restitution is about repairing our earthly relationships in order to honor our heavenly Father. Numbers 5:7-8, God tells us that the one who has acted in such an ungodly manner, “... *must confess the sin he has committed. He must make full restitution for his wrong, add one fifth to it and give it all to the person he has wronged. But if that person (is not alive and) has no close relative to whom restitution can be made for the wrong, the restitution belong to the Lord and must be given to the priest.* Proverbs 14:9, tells us that, “*Fools mock at making amends for sin, but the godly acknowledge it and seek reconciliation.*” So it will be the children of a fool who suffer because he or she failed to obey the Lord and make amends for their ill-gotten gains in life.

The fact is, many of us are today just wholly unprepared to finish the race that we have begun! Starting is easy. Finishing is a whole other issue! Which bring us to the subject matter of the second half of our text. Beginning in verse 15 we have a story concerning Israel and their going to battle *once again* with the Philistines. Sadly, some of our personal enemies, like the Philistines, will come back at us again and again, and our fight will be rather a long war...sometimes a lifetime. God told the apostle Paul that He would not take away the “thorn in his flesh”...*whatever that might have specifically been*, because, *God said*, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.”

This was the enemy David so famously took out with a slingshot and a stone so many years before. When this old familiar enemy came back for another round, this time David was not ready. He was ill-prepared and apparently out of shape. For in the midst of the battle, the story tells us that David “grew weary.” If it had not been for those around him...those who fought beside him, he would have died in the battlefield. Maybe David had begun to think like a lot of us. That we are “entitled” and deserving and maybe even special. We allow pride and perceived rise in spiritual standing to entice us into lethargy and arrogance. We then let ourselves grow spiritually and physically flabby, and laziness and self-absorbed thinking quickly follows! Then when the inevitable trial...that sure spiritual battle finally comes, we crumble because we just were not in any condition to fight. Saul moved against God’s will because of his emotions and his “feelings.” It seems that self-absorption and wrong priorities came before God and David too nearly fell to the same.

Recently I read of a 101 year old guy in Minneapolis who has been a church usher at his church for 80 years, and even is still active doing deacon work there. Apparently He made a promise *and* kept in both physical and spiritual condition to meet the challenges and the needs of others. If it was merely about him, I have no doubt he would have found a comfortable pew somewhere to camp out in until life ebbed away! But it seems that he understands the principle of faithfulness!

Both of these accounts in this chapter hold one principle in common, and that is the scriptural dynamic that we “*reap what we sow.*” Galatians 6:7-9 warns us of such “*Don’t be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant. Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit.*” Laziness and undisciplined living will surely reap the harvest of confusion, a “low-yield” spiritual life and a joyless and lonely existence.

All of this comes in the midst of a human generation that allows their feelings and emotions to rule. The world says, “*listen to your heart*” but God says, “*The human heart is the most deceitful of all things and desperately wicked.*” As Christians, God doesn’t want us to lean on our own passions, emotions, or understanding. He wants us to lean on Him and His.

## **SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND REVIEW**

1. How do you know if your heart is truly humbly exposed and vulnerable before the Lord?
2. Have you ever felt compelled to go back and clean up a mess you made? How did it go?
3. What was your primary motive for cleaning up that past mess?
4. If God forgives and forgets, why should I ever have to make amends and clean up a past mess?
5. How can you measure how much distance there is between you and Christlikeness?
6. Which way are you heading—away from Him or are you incrementally closing your gap?
7. How much do you trust your emotions and passions? (What is your “measuring stick” to come to that conclusion?)
8. How do you know if you are spiritual “in shape?” and not waiting for a case of chronic “battle fatigue” which could be your ‘end?’
9. How does one spiritually “stay in shape” and ready for inevitable battle with the enemy?”

### **IN REVIEW: Practical application**

#1 – Make sure you are allowing people to press into your life and that you are aggressively building relationships with them so you can be growing in a culture of honesty. Your primary “aggressive relationship” should be faith family (and spouse if you have one!).

#2 – You know when you’re lying about something and hiding things from the brothers and sisters God has placed in your life. No doubt we should not “wear our heart on our shirt sleeve” and gush about every negative element of our lives, but you should be humble and willing to examine your heart and let those you say you love to do so also!

#3 – Become honest and biblically aware of the gap between who you are and your Christlike goals. You will find a template for Christlikeness in Galatians 5:22-23. An ocean of humility is often necessary to move forward and to do so in the full light of those you call your community.

Tip #4 – Daily seek to close the gap between you and the living manifest of the Spirit you see in Jesus. This will involve prayer, study, meditation, fellowship and accountability, and *always always* a humble and contrite spirit! Ps 34:18 - *The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit.* Ps 51:17 - *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise.*

#5 – Read, digest, and practice the content of scripture. The Word of God *must* move beyond an intellectual treatment to a practical roadmap of discipline and self-discovery.

#6 - It is important to tell at least from time to time the secret of who we truly and fully are because otherwise we run the risk of losing track of who we truly and fully are and little by little come to accept instead the highly edited version which we put forth in hope that the world will find it more acceptable than the real thing. –