

Belinda McCleese:

Hello. I am so happy that we are gathered here today at this women's event and we can get more of God's word. We can be fed by him through me to you. We have this opportunity to feast on his word.

Belinda McCleese:

The topic I want to talk about is promise. Now let's consider what this word means. It's a simple and familiar word, whether we announce it to a crowd, to one person. In general, we understand that the word promise means that if someone says they will do something, then they will do it. We understand that in general, but even as children, we develop an understanding of what the word promise means. For example, as a kid, you may think of a pinky promise and you may say, "Okay, pinky promise. So if you lose, then you've got to let me play your video game." Or you may say, "If you lose, you've got to give me candy." That's the kid version of what a promise is, that if someone loses something, then you make an agreement to give up something else. And that's a pinky promise. Cross my heart. That's a pinky promise. And those are cute promises.

Belinda McCleese:

But as we grow and become older, we have different experiences, and some of those experiences we have could be negative. A person we may experience, someone who keeps their promise and someone who doesn't. And if you don't keep your promise or someone doesn't keep their promise to you, you may feel disappointed. You may feel betrayed. Deceive, a loss of trust. You may feel devastated and it can destroy relationships. It can cause trauma. Just leave you feeling discombobulated.

Belinda McCleese:

And we oftentimes turn to God in our struggle, and it's easy to correlate broken trust with man to that of how we have trust with God. And some people truly struggle with trusting God. But this message is one of hope to understand that God's promises never change. They are unchangeable and they are unbreakable. We have the indwelling Spirit of God in us, and we can experience this unbreakable promise as Jacob did.

Belinda McCleese:

Let's watch Jacob's story in Genesis 28:10-19 in the American Sign Language translation.

Belinda McCleese:

"Jacob left Beershebe and set out for Harran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and laid down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord, and he said: 'I am the Lord, the God of your father, Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.'

Belinda McCleese:

"When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.' He was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.' Early the next morning, Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz."

Belinda McCleese:

Now, after watching the Scripture about the story of Jacob's dream, wow, can you imagine Jacob's journey? From a friend's town to the next town, looking for a wife? But the sun began to set, and so he had to stop. And if you think back then, they didn't have any fancy hotels with nice, cushioned soft beds that you could just sink into, big beds. They didn't have an Airbnb or anything of that nature. Back then in that time, they had to sleep outside. And that's why it was common back then for Jews to travel in the different journeys that they would take. That's what they would do. And so Jacob, he saw the stone and he used this stone as a pillow, for example, a pillow, something to lay his head on.

Belinda McCleese:

Now you may think, why would he lay on a stone? But this was common. Again, this was normal for Jews, for Hebrews to do that. They didn't travel and pack a mattress or pack a wood bed frame, or pillows, and all these other types of things that we normally pack or people pack to have comfort. They didn't have fancy hotels. They had to use what was accessible to them outside. So he found a stone. He looked for the right stone, the perfect stone. He didn't just pick any old stone, something that was hard and rough. No, he found the right stone. Took his time. One that was a perfect fit for his head. And he used that to lay his head on and go to sleep.

Belinda McCleese:

And what happened next was during his dream, he saw the angels of the Lord descending and ascending, and he said, "Surely the Lord is here and I did not know it." And from this story, we have learned three Ps of God's unbreakable promise.

Belinda McCleese:

The first P that I want to point out here is the presence of God, his presence. Now, it wasn't common in that time for someone to experience the presence of God. Again, during that time for the Jews, they had to experience the presence of God within the temple. At first, you would go into the temple, the first areas where you would send burnt offerings. And the next area is where they would fellowship. Breaking of bread and you have fragrances and candles and social fellowship is what happened in that next place. And then in the inner place was the holy place, the holy of holies. And you would go into that area and that's where the presence of God resided. And that was a cherished, valued place. And in that place, it was the tabernacle which held the presence of God. But as time began to progress, they developed a permanent temple for the presence of God.

Belinda McCleese:

And so I'm reminded of for myself a few years ago, several years, actually, I went to Jerusalem and there they have the Wailing Wall. And there that's where Jews and Hebrews would come to pray. They would take slips of paper and put it in between the bricks of the Wailing Wall and they would pray and wail before the Lord, because during that time for them, they had no temple. They had no temple of where the presence of God resided. But for us, as Christians, as believers, we are the temple of God. We have

the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which means we can always experience his presence anytime. And that is so powerful. We are the living temple. If you think after Jesus died and resurrected and was in heaven, we the believers became the temple of God and have the indwelling of his Spirit, his presence. And in order to truly experience all God has for us, we must have his presence because his presence brings fullness of life. Fullness of joy, fullness of life in the presence of God is what we can experience as believers.

Belinda McCleese:

Several years ago, a church that I attended, we were having a time of fasting and prayer, and we would gather at the church in the church building in the evening for prayer service and the pews were empty. We would walk around praying during this service. And so during that time, I chose to sit down in a pew in a time of just prayer. And as I sat there praying, I saw a vision of Jesus on a horse, crowned king, the king Jesus with this long flowing robe. And as he continued to come close to me, my body became limp and I fell down out of the pew onto the floor, face down, prostrate in awe of his presence. I did not feel the same after that. I was changed. I was more aware of Jesus's presence, of the presence of God. And that indwelt in me, helps me to understand Jacob's experience. I'll tell you a little bit more about that story later in my talk, but I want to go back to the point of the presence of God. We must have his presence.

Belinda McCleese:

And secondly, his provision. God told Jacob, "The land on which you lie, I will give to you and your offspring." He said, "I will give you this land." Wow. Now, Jacob already knew the promise God gave to Abraham to bless the generations coming after, but he really didn't sink in. And so God had to tell Jacob directly, "You Jacob, you, your family, you will have this land." And he gave Jacob guidance. He told him where to go. He said, "You go as far as the west, as far as the east, as far north, as far south. That land I give to you." And so when we receive the promise of God, he will give us direction. He will tell us what to do. He will not leave us without instruction. He will guide us. That is the character of God.

Belinda McCleese:

It's like the idea of a GPS. I think of when I first start thinking about, "Well, what does a GPS really mean?" And I learned that it means the global positioning system. I recently learned this, what GPS meant. Now I've used a GPS for many years. And I remember when you think GPS now is obviously what's popular. But back in the day, we had to use a map and it was tiny. You need a magnifying glass to figure out where those lines were, and it was a lot of work. And then we moved, maybe upgraded, if you will, to a book, maybe an Atlas where you could just turn the page. And it was a little bit better using a book form to try to find direction. But now we have the GPS.

Belinda McCleese:

And so I remember when I was new to using a GPS, I was driving with one of my hearing friends. And I noticed that my hearing friend, she would say, "Turn left, turn right, go left, go left, go this way, move over." And it was just throwing me off. And she said, "Hey, it's not me. It's the GPS. I'm interpreting for the GPS." I said, "Oh, I didn't know the GPS has a voice that tells you the direction in which you should go. That is so cool." Now that I think about it, it parallels with this text. When we have the indwelling Spirit of God, his promise is to guide us.

Belinda McCleese:

The third point is the protection of the Lord. He says, "I am with you." He told this directly to Jacob. "I am with you. I will keep you wherever you go." The Lord said, "I will be with you. I will keep you. I will protect you." And when we think of these three Ps, God's provision is so gracious. His promise, these three encompassed together, shows the graciousness of God in his promises, giving us everything we need to receive his promises.

Belinda McCleese:

I remember during a time in my life, when I was pastoring at a church, I was working with a family whose son struggled with drugs. I would often visit him in jail, encouraging him. And when he got out, he got mixed up in some gang activity and I would intercede and offer support for the family. Things were kind of getting out of control with him. And so I would visit often and work with this family. And the family informed me that the gang was getting suspicious of who I was. They were, "Who is that lady?" And the family wanted to protect me as their pastor because I lived fairly close to the church. They didn't live too far. And the gang as well, lived nearby and I could easily be found. And so I began to become fearful and concerned. I was concerned for my safety. I was overcome with fear because I knew the gang activity and what they were capable of doing. The threats, the shootings, the violence, all of those stories I was aware of. And I just really began to struggle, but God's grace helped me.

Belinda McCleese:

I remember one time I was walking to the car and out of the blue, there was nothing in the sky. Out of the blue, a single feather floated in front of me and landed in my hand. And immediately I thought of the Scripture in Psalms 91:4. And it says, "He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings, you will find refuge." Oh, that struck me. So I had the assurance of his protection that he was protecting me. And I felt so moved that it helped me to overcome that fear and continued to minister to this family, continued to be steadfast until he was pulled out of that gang activity. And I'm so thankful for the Lord and his faithfulness.

Belinda McCleese:

And so back to Jacob, Jacob laying there asleep, wow. He says, "Surely the Lord is here and I was not aware of it." Jacob was changed in that moment. And remember before that, Jacob, he was in fear of his brother Esau, because Esau wanted to kill him over his birthright. Esau didn't care initially. And once Jacob was blessed with his birthright, Esau was angered and he wanted to kill Jacob. So he was living in fear. He was in fear of Esau, but after Jacob was in the presence of the Lord, did you notice that then fear turned into reverence for the Lord? His presence can destroy all fear.

Belinda McCleese:

Now I want to also give you a New Testament example. Let's look in Mark 4:34-41. Here's the American Sign Language translation:

Belinda McCleese:

"That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, 'Let us go over to the other side.' Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, don't you care if we drown?' He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still.' Then the wind died down

and it was completely calm. And he said to the disciples, 'Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?' They were terrified and asked each other, 'Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him.'"

Belinda McCleese:

Oh boy, I really enjoy watching the Scripture in sign language. It's so vivid and the stories really come to life, the action. You can really see it all come to life.

Belinda McCleese:

I want to revisit the three Ps. You have the first P as the presence of God. And clearly Jesus is there. Jesus is here. Jesus was there. The disciples experienced Jesus physically there, shared with him, prayed with him, walked with him, journeyed with him. They were there in the presence of God being Jesus. And secondly, we see in this story, the provision. Jesus said, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake. Let us go to the other side." He gave them guidance. He provided guidance and direction and instruction. He said, "This is where we are going." Remember, the promises of God always includes direction. He provides direction and clarity. They go hand in hand. Jesus's promise always gives instructions. He said, "Let us go over to the other side." He provided with his promise. He remembered a promise, he announced what was going to happen. And when the word of God comes forth, when Jesus speaks a word, you can trust it will come to pass.

Belinda McCleese:

As the boat traveled, Jesus laid his head down on a cushion and rested. Now, Jesus, he was on this cushion. And we think about Jacob, he laid on a hard stone. You have a cushion and the stone, but listen, remember Jesus is the rock. Jesus is our rock. And so Jesus, he rested on his promise. So he slept. And if you think about the story, you saw it illustrated how vivid it was, the storms and the waves crashing into the boat where it was almost swamped. And the disciples were in fear, while Jesus all along is laying peacefully, sleeping. And when they awoke him, they said, "Do you not care?" And he commanded the storms to calm and the waves to cease. And he said to the disciples, "Why are you afraid? Where is your faith?" Their fear caused them to focus on the storms. And after they focused on the storms and Jesus commanded the storms to cease, they turned their eyes and begin to fear and reverence the Lord. That is so powerful. That is what we need. We need to experience the promise of God, where we are unshakeable.

Belinda McCleese:

When we have his presence, his provision and his protection, all of that indwelling within us, we will be steadfast and unmovable. We will have that unbreakable promise. We can't forget this in his word. As Christians, we may struggle, but if we practice his presence, he will give us his provision. He will lead us and guide us and give us instructions. And then he will also protect us. And that is the authority that we have in God and his promises. The devil can't steal that from us. He cannot steal that from us unless we allow him to do so.

Belinda McCleese:

Remember, we may have fear, but we must keep our eyes focused on the right thing. We must keep our eyes focused on the Lord and reverence the Lord. He is bigger than our problems. He is bigger than our storms. He is bigger than our enemy. He is bigger than my hurt. He is bigger than anything that we go through. We surrender those things to God. And again, remember, Jacob rested on the promises of God. He rested on the rock, the promises of God. He couldn't fix it in his own way and on his own. He had to

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rest in the Lord, rest on the promises of God. We need to rest in his promises as Jacob did, and we can experience a joy, an unspeakable joy. Amen.