

Tanya Polstra:

Hello everyone, and welcome to the Deaf Women's Conference. I am so thrilled that you've decided to join us for this conference. I hope that you're not watching by yourself. I hope that you're with groups of other women watching this wonderful conference. My name is Tanya. My last name is Polstra. I am so honored that the women who are running this conference have asked me to come and present. It was so easy for me to say yes, because I have such a heart for sharing His word with you all. And I just cherish and love you each so dearly.

Tanya Polstra:

The topic of this conference, if you were looking at the image, it was an image of a diamond because we wanted the theme, "Unbreakable." Each presenter will have their own word connected with the word unbreakable. So my topic for this presentation is Word. Obviously you know that sign language and English are very different. They're both equal in their validity, but they are different. So for the word and concept in English, maybe you could sign, "not breakable", like this. Maybe you could sign it that way. But I really want to understand what is the accurate sign. What's conceptually accurate for it? What does unbreakable mean?

Tanya Polstra:

So a bunch of us got together and we tried to discuss how to sign it accurately and we wanted to sign it like this. Unbreakable, impossible to damage. And that's one word that I've been thinking about so much, and the word "word" as well. Word like scripture, I feel like there's so much more meaning behind it. The concept is so much deeper. So I wanted to share some scripture with you that hopefully will help you to understand this concept better.

Tanya Polstra:

In Hebrews 4:12, and you can read from the NIV or NLT. It depends on whatever your personal preference is, it says, "For the word of God is living and active." 2 Timothy 3:16-17 it says, "All scripture is God breathed. It's profitable for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness. It helps us discern what's right and wrong." James 1:22, "But be doers of the word, not merely hearers only, deceiving yourselves." Isaiah 40:8, "The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of God stands forever." Matthew 24:35, "Heaven and earth will pass away. But the words of the Lord will not pass away." Psalm 119:130, "The unfolding of your words gives us light. It imparts wisdom and understanding to the simple."

Tanya Polstra:

All those scriptures that I just mentioned, they make me think. Especially for John 1:1, it talks about in the beginning was the word and the word was with God. And so obviously we know from church from Bible studies, we've talked about this word "word" before, but it's a who, it's not a what. So who is the word? The word is Jesus. So taking that into consideration, we can think about unbreakable. And we can think about Jesus and how Jesus is unbreakable.

Tanya Polstra:

One of the things that I was thinking about as I was researching all of this and really challenged me as a deaf person, as a woman, as someone who really values my identity. Often we go through life And we're trying to share and spread love, but we try to conceal or bypass our identity, and trying to remember

that we are made in His image. So we're only here on earth temporarily. It's not like it just happened that we were deaf and that it was a mistake and that it's completely messed up and in heaven everything is going to be perfect and we're going to be normal and just like everyone else. Is that true?

Tanya Polstra:

When you're reading the Bible is that really what's going to happen? God had a purpose in creating us in His image. That means that while we are here, we are to be in relationship with Him. We're to get to know who He is and what His purpose is from the beginning to end, what it looks like. We are to walk in clarity to be able to show others love. Our first goal here on earth is so simple. It's to be in relationship with Him to have a personal deep relationship with the Lord. That is our first goal, is to be in constant communion with Him, to feel His heartbeat, to feel His pulse and not to be disconnected from that. But to be close to His heart, close to His character. It's a personal relationship with the Lord.

Tanya Polstra:

Our second goal and our way to live here on earth is to be in a relationship with other people. People. People. That's not a new concept or a new idea. That's been part of His character from the beginning, even from the Old Testament to the New Testament, it is so abundantly clear that we are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, mind, and soul. That's first. Our second priority is to love other people, to love our neighbor, to show love, to teach, to encourage, to help others seek a relationship with Him and to connect to others. Not only to say, "Oh, I have my relationship with the Lord. You have yours. You just focus on yourself." That's not part of His plan and His purpose. His purpose is for us to love Him and then to be together in community and unity.

Tanya Polstra:

So I want to ask you, as deaf women, we have experienced unity. We've seen this community come together in care and love. If someone's sick, we're saying "Sure, here, let me bring you a meal. Let me bring you soup. What can I give you? How can I love you?" It's giving resources. Have you experienced that? Or maybe you've experienced seeing someone who's sick. Maybe it's a mental health issue. Maybe it's depression. Maybe they have feelings inside their identity is lacking. They're just having trouble. Have you tried to say, "Hey, how can I support you? How can I help you find purpose for your life?" Or do you just say to your neighbor, "Oh, it's a mental health issue." How do you respond to that situation? Which way do you go?

Tanya Polstra:

Or maybe you're looking at someone in need who's poor, who doesn't have enough to pay the bills, who's so worried that their insurance is going to be cut off, that their gas is going to be cut off. They don't have any money. And they're worried about how they're going to pay bills the next day. And they hope that can survive and get to work. If we know of that situation, what are we doing? Are we saying, "Sure, here, what do you need? How can I help you meet your needs? How can I pay your bills?" There's so many different situations, so many opportunities in life. And when it comes to His word, His unbreakable word, Jesus intended us to be His image bearers, so that we can show this belief that it's living and breathing and active. And we can show who He is.

Tanya Polstra:

So I do want to address one story. It's in John 5:3-9. Let's go ahead and watch this story unfold.

Tanya Polstra:

(silence)

Tanya Polstra:

When you watch that story, I really want you to think about it. Jesus looked at this man who had been laying there who couldn't move for 38 years. 38 years. And he wasn't alone. There were other people there. There were so many other disabled people there that were watching and waiting just like him. He was near the water. And just for some cultural context here, when the water started to stir and move, it was like everyone had this hope of healing and they would jump in the water. So at that time, that was the tradition.

Tanya Polstra:

So Jesus came and He saw this man and He didn't see his condition first. He saw his soul first. He went over to this man... And I want to back up for just a moment. For 38 years, where was this man? He was in a synagogue. And this wasn't a new concept. He had heard of Jesus before. It's not like he didn't know who this man was that was coming to ask him a question. He had heard of Jesus. Word had gotten out about Him. And if you look at the Bible story, typically how Jesus approaches people with disability, they already know of Him. They've heard of the miracles He's done. So there were teachers, but this disabled group of people were not allowed into the same area. They were considered unclean. And so the disabled people would be on the outskirts and would be allowed to listen to the teaching and the preaching that was happening of the word. So they'd be able to listen.

Tanya Polstra:

So when Jesus comes over to this man, He asks him, "Do you want healing?" What's the man's response? His response is, "I'm stuck. I can't. I've tried crawling my way in. But I can't. Other people get there first." That's his response. He already knows Jesus has done so many miracles, but still his identity is tied to his own experience. He's not thinking of himself as an image bearer. In the Old Testament, you can remember that even Moses had this idea when he was going to the Pharaoh to get the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses kept begging the Lord, "I want to see your face." He kept asking for that. And God kept telling him, "You can't. You can't see my face. But I will walk in front of you." So it's the same concept with Moses begging and begging and begging to see God's face.

Tanya Polstra:

Now this man for 38 years, he's there able to see God. He sees Jesus and still he hasn't connected with Him because of how society sees him, how society has told him that he's nothing. This man, his belief was, "I'm stuck. I'm stuck and I can't do anything." Jesus' response, is it, "Oh, it's okay. You can do it." Is it codling? No. He says, "Get up. Pick up your mat. Walk. I'm giving you the responsibility to do something." Jesus is not looking at his disability only. He's not focused on that. He's not focused on the condition. He's looking at this man saying, "Look, I made you. I am the master artist. I made you. I have so much planned to you. You have so much to offer the world. You have so much that you can do."

Tanya Polstra:

Jesus is trying to say, "Get up and do it." He's not trying to say, "Oh, I've created you. You can do this, this, this, this." No, he's saying, "You, get up. Walk. I've given you gifts to offer the world." And typically on the Sabbath, you were not allowed to do any type of work on that day. But still people noticed what

Jesus did, that he had gotten up and he had walked, instead of saying, "Hey, what can this man share with us?" So I'm trying to explain how can this apply to us. Again, unbreakable, who Jesus is, that's part of His identity is unbreakable. So if we trust and we have a relationship with Him and a responsibility to learn from Him, we can love our sisters. We can see how they have of needs and try to come together as a community to show clearly how Jesus would respond, to have this connection and show others who He is through us.

Tanya Polstra:

I have something else to show you. What do you see here? It's a quarter. When I look at this quarter, obviously I know what it's called, it's a quarter. And if I were to ask you, would you identify this quarter as heads? Or would you identify it as tails? Which would you say is the number one identity of this quarter? What's the key representation of a quarter, heads or tails? They're both equally important, right? Heads represents the quarter. Tails represents the quarter. Both of them are equally important. We can apply this same metaphor to who we are. We are made in His image. We are His image bearers. We're His daughters. The other side of the quarter, for example, heads, we are Christ's children. We are His daughters. We are representing Him to other people. We are following Jesus. It's in how we walk, how we talk, how we go about our daily activities.

Tanya Polstra:

Now the tails side of the quarter, that's our deaf identity. He made us. He gave us what we can use to go out to the world and show who He is. We can show the world who He is through sign language, through our identity, through our life, through our thoughts and our feelings, how we act, how we sit, how we eat, how we breathe, how we use our voices. Everything has been given from God. There is no mistake in how He created us. Our identity has two sides. We are His. We're made in His image. We're His image bearers.

Tanya Polstra:

So I do work as director of Silent Blessing Deaf Ministries, and I work with families of deaf and hard of hearing children ages 0 to 10. So about birth to fifth grade. And there's one other organization, Deaf Teen Quest, that focuses on teenagers, on middle school, high school, that age group. But my focus is on babies and little children. So I typically talk to parents. And a lot of times they've had a lot of negative influences and they think it's never the parent's choice... I mean, it's never the parent's choice for their children to be deaf.

Tanya Polstra:

Typically, if a mom has a daughter... In this specific situation she was four years old. The first time she held her daughter, of course, she had some grief. She had had this image of her child's life and it was blown to pieces. She was thinking, "What can a deaf person's life look like? Can there be success? Are there other deaf people out there?" All these questions would be buzzing through her head of she has thing to compare it to. She has no idea of what a deaf person's life looks like. And so of course, she's going to go through feelings of, "What do I do? There's so many questions."

Tanya Polstra:

So in this situation, her daughter was four and she had questions. And she thought that speaking and hearing were very important. They were the top priority. So in this ministry, she decided to contact us. And she said, "Yes, I'm a believer. I follow Christ. But for my daughter, she's deaf. And I just don't

know..." She started sharing her emotions and she started sharing her thoughts and her overwhelmed feeling of just saying, "It doesn't make sense. I don't know what to do." And she wanted more answers. She wanted the truth. So I sat there and just listened to her for a while, and listened to her walk through her feelings. And I tried to tell her, "We have so many resources. There's sign language. There's so many options."

Tanya Polstra:

And it was like talking to a wall. She couldn't understand. She kept thinking that if she went the route of sign language, her daughter would be delayed. And so she had already made this decision and it was like I couldn't tell her anything. It wouldn't go through. And she hadn't really met a deaf adult before. She hadn't been able to see what a successful story looks like. And she couldn't understand what her daughter could grow up to be as a deaf individual. And I tried to tell her, "I understand. I'm a mother, too. I have children." So I decided to go another route. I said, "Would you mind taking a break for 30 minutes? I'm going to go to the store and come back." She said, "Okay."

Tanya Polstra:

So I went to the store, I collected a few different types of pop and I brought them back. And I sat down in front of her and I said, "Okay, so if you go to, for example, a state fair or a bazar, or any type of event like that, if you decide that you're thirsty or hungry, where do you go?" And she said, "Oh, I would go to the different tables that they have set up in the booths. I said, "Sure. You know that they're selling food and drink. You know what that looks like. Okay. So if you go and you find a table and they only have four types of soda, they have four types of pop. They have Sprite, they have Coke, they have Pepsi and they have Dr. Pepper. That's it, just four. If you look at those four, you would say, 'Oh, I already know that there are so many more options out there. There's so many options of pop.' But this specific booth has four options. So would it make a difference if you had never seen pop before in your life? You had never seen soda, you had no clue what it is? If you looked at that booth, would you believe that there's only four types of pop out there?" And she said, "Yes."

Tanya Polstra:

I said, "Okay. So if I have a table now, and I put out a whole bunch of different types of pop, if I put out Coke, Pepsi, zero sugar, all these different options. And now you would understand a little bit more of the background." And I tried to explain to her more of how... She feels stuck, she doesn't want to teach her daughter sign language. And I tried to explain, "That's like having Coke and Pepsi. You feel like those are your only options. And that's it. So I really want you to look at all the other varieties here, all the other options, maybe 10 or 11 different sodas." And yes, I spent some money in this analogy. But I really wanted her to understand that Coke is something we see every day. Pop is something we see all the time. So you can understand this image and trying to relay to her that that's our resources for deaf children.

Tanya Polstra:

We have so many resources available. It's not just two. You don't only have two options. You have so many options. And you're only looking at two. And in that moment I could see in her what's called a paradigm shift. She could finally start to see more of what's going on. And so I could have more of a discussion with her. And it's similar to diamond. A diamond is beautiful. It's so valuable. It's expensive. One small diamond, there's one out there that's worth \$83 million. And we are His image bearers.

There's no price on us. There's no value set on us. We're invaluable. So at that moment, when I was speaking with this mother, talking about a diamond, how do you form a diamond?

Tanya Polstra:

About a hundred miles under the earth, there's heat and there's intense pressure. And it compresses until finally it burst up out of the earth and that's how diamonds are made. But first the diamond has to go through this intense pressure and heat. It's uncomfortable. It's not pretty. It's a rough process. There's a lot of emotions involved. There's a lot of trying to get out assumptions and go through different options and what it looks like for her daughter to be part of our community.

Tanya Polstra:

Jesus saw this man. He saw his soul first, not his condition first, not his disability. We need to be the same. And we need to show His image because Jesus is unbreakable. He has made us. That means that we need to show His image and who He is and point others to Him. We have so much to offer. Use your gifts, use your skills, use whatever you can to invest in the community around you. The deaf community has a purpose. We need to include these children who are isolated, these parents who are searching for truth, parents who are still in the process of grief, children who still feel isolated, feel like they're sitting in a classroom and they have to work so hard to understand anything and they're exhausted and they don't know to do.

Tanya Polstra:

There are so many deaf children who hide their identity, but inside they are hurt and they are traumatized. Even teenagers. A lot of them are trying to find their place. They feel like they have no connection with deaf, no connection with hearing. They feel like they're not good enough and they don't fit in. A lot of them are continuing to deny their identity. A lot of us are continuing to deny identity as image bearers. Instead of saying that we're fine and just talking with our own little group, signing with our own little group and not including others, how far is that going to get us? We need to notice and we need to be brave and be together.

Tanya Polstra:

God is unbreakable. He created us and He's requiring us to process healing and to process trauma. It starts with heat. It starts with being uncomfortable and pressure and tears and going through trauma and seeing all that has happened. We need to be in relationship with the Lord first so that we can share His love with others, so that we can cherish others who are sick and who need care, and so that we can pay for others' bills, so we can invite people into our home, so that we can care and take care of others.

Tanya Polstra:

The last point I wanted to make before I wrap up. I'm going to go ahead and read from the notes that I made. Jesus is at work in you. Your life is invaluable. It is so precious and it is unbreakable because the Lord is in you and He loves you and cherishes you. It's just like an artist. We're artwork that people can look at in a museum. You can see the skill of the paint, the brushstrokes, every part of the artwork. It shows the artist. You can look at it on the wall and see the skill, the intense skill of the artist. We are His artwork. Each little brushstroke, each little line, all the color together, that's what makes us. It is so beautiful. The plans that God has for us are to do good works. Just like in Ephesians. It talks about, "We are His workmanship." We are here to do good works. That's what He wants to see until the end.

Tanya Polstra:

Maybe you feel like you're looking back and you're remembering that trauma in the classroom, at home, that internal struggle of feeling like, "Am I worthy? Am I worth anything? Am I loved? Am I valued? Can I find people that will understand me? Can I find people to be in relationship with?" The answer is yes. Yes. When you see a quarter, remember we are His daughters. We are His image bearers. We are in relationship with Him. He is part of our identity. But also we are deaf, hard of hearing. That's part of our identity as well. Well, maybe you're deaf-blind. There's such a beautiful variety. We live in this gloriously, diverse world, and God made us that way.

Tanya Polstra:

And in the future, when we are finally all in heaven together, we will be able to sign His praises. That's in Revelation. You can see that this celebration will take place. We'll see God seating on the throne. The one who saved us, Jesus Christ, He'll be on the right hand of the Father. What a glorious moment. We'll be able to see the one who saved us, who came to earth and was crucified for us in our place. He took our punishment. We'll be able to express in our identity, in our language, we'll be able to express and we'll be able to see and experience everyone else doing that at the same time, all the different languages from all different cultures and countries coming together in harmony. Imagine that. That's God's heart. What an amazing day that will be. He has made us that way.

Tanya Polstra:

Jesus is unbreakable. Enjoy this wonderful conference. We have so many amazing women who will be presenting, who are incredibly skilled. And I hope that you pray and whatever God is telling you through the Holy Spirit, you can feel His direction. You can feel what He's going to tell you to do and feel His heart. Love to all of you.