

PROMISES, PROMISES

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According to the dictionary a promise is a pledge, covenant, binding declaration or vow between one person or party and another. It creates an expectation, hope or assurance that something will or will not happen. It is the strongest form of commitment wrapped up in one word that I can think of.

Remember when David and Jonathan committed themselves to one another as friends by mixing their blood? That is about as close as you can get to another person, isn't it? These days such a show of loyalty is not only macabre, but it is potentially dangerous. However, it did prove they really meant what they said. The next best thing these days is to place your hand on the Bible as they do in court and 'promise to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth'. During the Pledge of Allegiance a person often places their hand over their heart. During the vows at a wedding, the bride and groom hold hands and look into one another's eyes and make their promise of faithfulness to one another. A promise is a sacred vow.

So what does a promise mean to us today? It seems to me that, like many aspects of society, a promise has lost its power in regard to its original meaning. Couples are making up vows to suit themselves. A girl I know promised herself to her new husband for twenty years with a right to review after that. Many couples go into marriage now not really expecting to last the distance, yet they still make the lifelong promise. Others skip the 'promise' bit altogether and just live together 'without ties'. Some make promises with good intentions, but are prepared to break them when their situation doesn't match the promise any more. It is the stuff country music songs thrive on. Ultimately, a broken marriage devastates a child. We need to be very careful what we promise them. It can be anything from a promise to take them to the movies, to go on a promised vacation, to be at their soccer game or to attend their graduation.

Kids don't understand why anything else can be more important than them. And one could ask, should anything else stand in the way of a promise? A child's hopes can be dashed by a commitment made without thought. As soon as we declare we are going to do something and fail to do it, not only has our word been broken now, but the child learns they cannot trust our word in the future. This situation has huge implications. When can they be sure we will carry out our word?

My husband had a girl brought to his office at school. She had been misbehaving and Brian told her he would have to call her mother. She said, "You can call her, but it won't make any difference. She will come storming down here and tell you that she will deal with me when I get home. But she won't. We will

get in the car and she won't say another word about it. I can do just about anything I like." "What would you like her to do?" Brian asked. "I would like her to say 'no' sometimes. Then I would know she really loves me," replied the girl.

Keeping your word is a sign of respect for another person. If you don't keep your promises, your kids could doubt your love for them. They will also learn that promises are really a 'maybe' and they won't get their hopes up in case they don't come true. They will also learn that there is little meaning in a promise and that they, too, can break their word when it suits them.

Our word should be our bond. If we can't be trusted it infiltrates our whole lives, not only within our families, but also in our jobs and within our whole social network. This is not a legacy we want to pass on to our children. If you are not sure you can carry out a promise, then don't make it. Let's promise ourselves that we will preserve its true meaning.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.