

The Power of a Promise

The power of a promise is incredible. It is impossible for us to overestimate the impact a promise can make on us and on those to whom we make our promises.

Mark Hanson tells this story. In 1989, an 8.2 earthquake almost flatten the country of Armenia, killing over 30,000 people in less than 4 minutes. In the midst of utter devastation and chaos, a father left his wife securely at home with their family and rushed to the school where his son was supposed to be, only to discover that the school was as flat as a pancake. After the traumatic, initial shock, the father remembered the promise he had made his son. "No matter what, I will always be there for you." Tears filled his eyes as he looked at the rubble in front of him. He kept remembering his commitment to his boy. "I will always be there for you." As he stood there, he concentrated on where he had walked his son to class every morning. Remembering his son's classroom, that it would be in the back right corner of the building, he rushed there and started digging through the rubble. As he was digging, other parents arrived, clutching their hearts, crying "my son, my daughter." Other well-meaning parents tried to pull the father away. "It's too late," they said. "They're all dead. You can't help. Go on home. Face reality. There's nothing you can do. You're just going to make things worse." The fire chief showed up and tried to pull the father off the school debris, saying "fires are breaking out everywhere. You're in danger. We'll take care of everything. Go on home." The police showed up. "We'll handle it," they said. "You're angry. You're distraught. Go on home. Nobody help this dad." So courageously he proceeded alone because he needed to know for himself if his boy was alive or dead. He dug with his hands for 8 hours, 12 hours, 24 hours, 36 hours, and in the 38th hour he pulled back a boulder and he heard his son's voice. He screamed his son's name, "Armand, Armand." And the boy answered back, "Dad. It's me, Dad. I told the other kids not to worry. I told them that if you were alive, you would save me, and when you saved me you would save all of them. You promised, 'no matter what I will always be there for you.'" The Dad asked, "What's going on in there? How is it?" The boy said, "There are 14 of us left out of 33, Dad. We're scared, we're hungry, we're thirsty, we're thankful you're here. When the building collapsed, it made a wedge like a triangle and it saved our lives." "Come on out, son." "No, no Dad. Let the other kids come out first because I know you'll get me no matter what. I know you'll keep your promise. I know you'll be there for me."

The power of a promise is incredible. You and I will probably never have an experience anywhere near that dramatic, but we should never underestimate the impact a promise can have on those to whom we make it. Armand's father made a commitment to his son, "I will always be there for you." And in the boy's worse moment of his life, he remembered the promise.