

The Promise

A Fictional Story

Nestled in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains in California, a new town was growing, appropriately called New Town. It was the mid 1950's, and the country was getting settled after the ravages and horrors of WWII. Many of the newcomers to the town were ex-military service personnel who had served during the war, and they came from all over the country. Some had received their military training in California, and others were stationed in California during the war. There were lots of marriages after the war, as heroes returned home to civilian life. Many of these heroes who had been in California during the war remembered the warm climate, the majestic mountain ranges, and the never-ending coastline of beaches; a paradise, to be sure. It was easy to see why people were attracted to California. Young families living in the mid-west and eastern states experiencing freezing, cold winters and hot, humid summers were especially interested in a new life in this paradise.

It was here in New Town that the Roberts family lived. The father, Bill, worked as draftsman with the local architect company. The mother, Julie was a stay-at-home mom and homemaker. Bill and Julie had a 10-year-old son named Tommy who was a typical all-American boy.

The Roberts family lived in a modest two bedroom home with a front porch that stretched across the length of the house, and a beautiful green lawn, kept green all summer thanks to lots of hand watering. Julie enjoyed taking care of the flower beds that surrounded the lawn, while Bill did the heavy work for her. The backyard was reserved for fruit trees and vegetable growing. It was an ideal environment in which Tommy had lots of open space to play.

They were a happy, loving family. Bill was a deacon at the local church at which they were regular attendees, twice on Sunday. Wednesday night was family night. There were children's activities, choir rehearsals, men's Band of Hope meetings, women's fellowships, and a Bible study for those not involved in other activities.

Tommy was a happy little guy, and he was prone to daydreams like many other kids are. He shared his dreams with his mom, telling her how he would love to have three things: a bicycle, a brother to play with (which always brought laughter from his mom that he never really understood), and at the top of the list was a puppy. As he went to school each day, he passed a pet store. The store always had puppies, kittens, birds, and other pets for sale. He had asked his dad several times if he could have a puppy, but his dad always replied that it was a lot of work and training to take care of a dog. It also cost three dollars to buy one!

Tommy kept thinking about the three dollars needed to buy a puppy. If he could come up with three dollars, maybe his dad would let him buy one, and if he promised to take care of the puppy all by himself, that just might work! But where to get the three dollars? He figured it was time to talk to mom; she always had good ideas.

In his very best good little boy posture, Tommy broached the subject with Julie. Julie sensed something big was coming before Tommy said anything. Moms have a built in sensory perception, after all. Julie listened to Tommy's plan with interest, realizing that Tommy was very

serious about getting a puppy. She listened intently as he pondered his problem on how he could get the three dollars needed.

Mom to the rescue! Julie wanted to help Tommy so badly. Suddenly, an idea came to her mind and she started to smile, which Tommy took as a good sign.

“Tommy,” she said, “I have an idea. You could do chores for me around the house and garden, and I will pay you twenty-five cents per chore.”

Tommy was delighted; it was a great idea! He quickly counted the number of quarters it would take to get to three dollars. It would take twelve quarters. He could do it!

Tommy could hardly wait for Bill to come home from work to tell him the plan, unsure how his dad would react to it. Julie had promised she would back him up on his plan.

Bill arrived home, having had a hard day at work. He said hi to Tommy and Julie, and then flopped down in his favorite armchair, closing his eyes. Tommy thought this is not a good sign. He looked at Julie who gave him the “no” sign with a shake of her head. Tommy went into his room feeling a little bit disappointed.

Julie called down the hall that dinner was ready, and Tommy slouched out to the dinner table and sat down. Bill said grace and proceeded to tell Julie about his hard day at work. Tommy sat quietly and said nothing. There was a lull in Bill and Julie’s conversation. He looked at Julie, and she subtly gave him the nod. “Go for it,” she seemed to say.

Tommy looked at Bill and said, “Dad?” Bill looked over and Tommy blurted out his plan for getting a puppy. Bill didn’t respond right away, and just looked to Julie. She didn’t say anything either, and stared back at Bill. The silence was deafening. Finally, Bill said, “Tommy, that is quite a plan. It will take a lot of chore work, and you have to promise stay with it. You can’t give up in the middle of it. I want you to see your plan through to the end to get your puppy. Do you think you can do that?” Tommy’s reply was a quick, loud “YES!!!”

Today is the biggest day of Tommy’s life. After doing all his chores over the past three weeks, he now had the three dollars he needed to buy his puppy. Julie was going to meet him after school at the pet store with his bag of quarters.

Trying to concentrate on what the teacher was saying was almost impossible. The clock in the classroom was moving ever so slowly. and it wasn’t even lunch time yet. Four o’clock eventually came. The bell rang, and Tommy raced out of the classroom and ran as fast as he could to the pet store. Julie was waiting for him, as promised.

There were several puppies playing in a sawdust-covered box. They were all so cute; how could he decide? The puppies were so busy playing they didn’t pay any attention to Tommy or Julie, until one finally broke away from the pack and came over to Tommy, wagging his little, thin tail. Tommy picked him up and held him to his face. To his amazement, a little tongue came out and licked his cheek, and Tommy fell in love immediately. Julie placed the bag of quarters on the

counter and Mr. Jones, the owner, gave Tommy a receipt and a beautiful feeding bowl. Julie chipped in and bought puppy food, and they headed home.

At home, Tommy found an empty cardboard box and Julie gave him an old blanket to put in. Tommy put the puppy in his new bed, but he wouldn't stay there and he started to cry to get out. What was Tommy to do? Mom to the rescue again! Julie came over with a dish of puppy food. It is amazing what a full tummy of food does for a puppy, Tommy thought. The puppy was happy to lay down in his new bed and fall asleep.

Bill arrived home from work, and Tommy was bursting to show him his new puppy. Bill was quite interested and asked Tommy if he had picked a name for him, which he hadn't. In fact, he hadn't even considered he needed a name.

After dinner, it was play time followed by bed time. Tommy took the puppy outside for one last time before going to bed. It had been a very exciting and tiring day, and Tommy was asleep in no time.

Sometime later, Tommy woke abruptly to the sound of his puppy crying. Tommy thought Julie would get up and take care of him, but then he realized he said he would take care of the puppy. Tommy stumbled out of bed, picked up the puppy, and held him on his lap. The puppy immediately fell asleep. "That was easy," Tommy said to himself. He put the puppy back into its bed, and went back to his own bed.

No sooner had he settled down than the puppy started to cry again. Tommy got up and went back out again to the puppy, where once again the puppy fell asleep in his lap again. Julie came into the room and explained to Tommy that the puppy was missing the heat and heartbeats of the other puppies. She filled a hot water bag with lukewarm water, found a wind-up clock, and put both in the puppy's bed. She put the puppy in his bed, covered him with his blanket, and they all slept soundly thereafter.

Tommy appeared for breakfast the next morning announcing that he had decided on a name for his puppy. The dog's name was to be Rover. He remembered a book he had read in which the hero of the story was a dog named Rover, so Rover it was.

At school the next day, Tommy sat next to his best friend Kenneth (Kenny for short). The two boys were inseparable since they met at school; the next best thing to brothers. Kenny lived with his mom not far from the Roberts' home. Kenny's father had died a few years earlier, a result of many war wounds that never healed properly. Kenny's mom worked as a nurse at the local veterinarian hospital, which meant Kenny was alone after school let out. Julie always welcomed Kenny to their home until it was time to go home with his mom at five o'clock.

Tommy hadn't told Kenny about Rover yet. He wanted it to be a surprise when they came home from school, and Kenny was certainly surprised! Kenny loved Rover instantly, just as Tommy had. Much of the time that afternoon was spent playing with Rover until he got tired playing, and Tommy put him in his bed.

The boys sat on the steps to the porch munching on freshly made cinnamon cookies that Julie had just made, still a little bit warm. About the only thing that the boys didn't do together was attend church and Sunday school. Tommy was always asking Kenny to come to church with him and his family, but Kenny said his mom didn't want to.

Tommy looked at Kenny and said, "If you come to church with me, I will give you my Rover." Kenny laughed and said, "Promise?" Tommy said yes and they both laughed and went on talking until it was time for Kenny to go home.

Sunday came around and the Roberts family walked to church. It was a nice clear and bright morning. The trees, bushes, and flowers displayed their beauty as they reached towards the heavens.

The Roberts family greeted friends and made their way quietly into the sanctuary. Being creatures of habit, they always sat in the same pew. The order of the service was always the same: welcome then announcements, followed by a couple of hymns, children's story time where all the children went to the front of the church, sat down on the floor, and Pastor Jack told them a story after which it was time to head off to their Sunday school classes.

Tommy was sitting, waiting for the service to start when to his amazement, Kenny and his mom walked into the sanctuary. Tommy was so excited that he whispered to Julie who had just come into the sanctuary. He whispered, because there was no talking in the sanctuary while waiting for the service to start.

Tommy could hardly contain himself, and when it came to the children's story time, Kenny came and sat with him. After the story, Tommy took Kenny to his Sunday school class and introduced him to the teacher. After the service, all the parents were talking to each other, eventually saying goodbye to head for home.

At lunch, Tommy, Bill, and Julie were still talking about seeing Kenny and his mom at church. Suddenly, Tommy went very quiet. He just remembered the promise he had made to Kenny that if he came to church he would give him Rover. Julie, sensing something was amiss, asked Tommy what was wrong. Tommy told Julie and Bill of the promise he had made to Kenny.

After Tommy told his parents of his promise to Kenny, there was silence. Finally, Julie said his promise was made on the spur of the moment, and that Kenny probably didn't think Tommy was serious. Bill, however, had that serious look on his face.

"Tommy" he said, "when we make promises to other people, we are obligated to keep that promise because we make them before God." Bill went on to say that promises are serious and we must believe wholeheartedly that we will keep our promises, otherwise our promises are meaningless. He also added that people soon realize when we don't keep our promises and then don't pay any attention to our promises in the future. There are many recordings of promises in the Bible. They are not meaningless promises; they are sincere. Many have been fulfilled, and many are ongoing, and God expects all of us to keep our promises.

After lunch, Kenny came over to the Roberts' house, and they talked about Sunday school. Soon they were running around outside, being chased by Rover. Julie looked out the window to see what they were doing, a big smile on her face thinking how boys will be boys.

Julie sat down, and picked up her knitting. She was always knitting socks for Bill and Tommy, or darning the holes in the heels of old worn socks. Bill was reading *The Sunday Times* newspaper. It was a typical quiet Sunday afternoon.

Suddenly, the front door burst open and closed abruptly. Tommy ran through the house into his bedroom and slammed the door shut. Bill and Julie looked at each other in astonishment. Julie went to Tommy's room and listened at the door. He was crying and sobbing so loud he could hardly breath. Julie went to the front of the house and looked out on the porch. Kenny was gone and so was Rover.

Julie then knew what had happened. Kenny had asked for Tommy to keep his promise and give him Rover. Tommy was in a state of shock. He never thought that Kenny would actually take his Rover from him. Julie's heart was breaking now, too. She loved Tommy so much that she couldn't bear to see him so upset. Bill was upset, too, but they decided to let Tommy cry it out, and soon Tommy was sound asleep.

Dinner time came, and Julie woke Tommy. His eyes were red from crying, but he came out a brave little guy. It was over; Rover was gone. Julie and Bill expressed how sorry they were, but assured Tommy that he did the right thing in keeping his promise, even though it hurt to do so.

After dinner, Tommy did some homework for school and eventually decided to just go to bed. He gave Julie and Bill both a big hug, said goodnight, and headed for bed. Kneeling before his bed, he said his nightly prayer, a prayer Julie had taught him:

Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep,
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.

Tommy prayed that God bless Julie and Bill, and then with a little hesitation, Kenny, and a further hesitation as he wondered if God blessed dogs. Surely He did. Dogs are so loving, loyal, always happy to greet you, and after all, God created them. God bless Rover.

The next morning was a school day, and Tommy wasn't too keen to go for several reasons. As he left home, Julie told him that Bill wanted to be sure that he cleaned up the porch after school, because it was still one of his responsibilities.

On his way to school, Tommy avoided the pet store. He saw Kenny, but didn't talk to him. After school, Kenny said he wouldn't be coming over, because he had to take care of his new dog.

Arriving home from school, Julie reminded him to clean up the porch before Bill came home. Tommy did and was waiting for Bill to come home from work to have dinner. He really felt

hungry, which was a good sign.

Bill came home, but it was not quite time to eat. He said to Tommy, "I thought you were told to clean up the porch today."

"I did," replied Tommy.

"Well," Bill said, "I nearly fell over a cardboard box lying out there." Tommy didn't believe it. He hadn't seen a cardboard box out there. He went and looked out on the porch, and sure enough, there was a cardboard box laying out there. How could he not have seen it before? He went out on the porch, and picked up the box. It was a little heavier than he expected, and as he tilted it, something slid inside the box. He set the box down and opened it. A little puppy was looking back at him, wagging its little, thin tail. It was different from Rover, but again, it was love at first sight.

Inside the house were two very happy parents, watching. Bill had stopped at the pet store on his way home from work and bought a new puppy for Tommy.

In heaven, someone else was smiling.

THE END

Of all the promises in the Bible the one that comforts me the most is Matthew 28 vs 20b Jesus said " Lo, (listen) I will be with you always, even to the end of the age."

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