

## Discussion Questions on Lewis Smedes' Sermon

### **"The Power of Promises"<sup>1</sup>**

1. What promises are you currently bound by? How do they impact your life?
2. Smedes says (p. 157),

Some people ask, "Who am I?" and expect an answer to come from their feelings. Some people ask, "Who am I?" and expect the answer to come from their accomplishments. Other people ask, "Who am I?" and expect the answer to come from what other people think of them. A person who dares to make and keep promises discovers who she is by the promises she has made and kept to other people.

How central are promises to who you are?

3. In the non-denominational Xenos Christian Fellowship (a church in Columbus, OH) they orient new believers using the concepts of their *position* (saved, adopted by Christ, a new creation, freed from the authority of sin, etc.), and their *condition* (fallen, often having the habits of the world but with varying levels of experience and maturity, etc.)<sup>2</sup>. Our condition should change as we grow, while our position does not. This can be a particularly useful distinction to make when we are discouraged by setbacks in spiritual growth, or in danger of falling into legalism.

How does this distinction mesh with Smedes' emphasis on promises? Should our identity be drawn from our promises to others, or from God's promises to us? (See Rom 9:8, Acts 2:28-29; 2 Cor 1:20; 2 Pet 1:4; Ps 85:8; Ps 119:148.)

4. What promises have you made but not kept the way you wanted to? What promise(s) do you wish you could make and keep?
5. Smedes says (p. 161),

When you get right down to it, everything we do together, from a nation conceived and born in liberty to a family reunion, from a successful political campaign to a winning baseball season, from a United Nations Organization to a church picnic—everything hangs on the thin thread of promises made and promises kept.

Do you agree? Does Smedes intend to make a distinction between person *A*, who makes and keeps promises, and person *B*, who does the same good things but avoids the commitment of making promises? ("When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it." —Eccl 5:4-5; See also Deut 23:21-23.)

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<sup>1</sup> From *A Chorus of Witnesses*, T. Long and C. Plantinga, Eerdmans' 1994

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.xenos.org/classes/bcweek3.htm>