

over you wherever you go.” When you feel alone, think to yourself: “If Jesus loves me enough to die for me, would he ever turn around and abandon me?” No way! What about right now? Here’s God’s promise: *“I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go.”* You are never alone. Never alone!

I hope those words give your heart peace. You are never alone. But God still has more! He piles on Jacob promise after promise. Here’s the last one: *“I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”* Those were God’s final words. “You can know without a doubt that I will keep every single promise.” Think of all the promises: The land. The descendants. The Savior. The watching over you wherever you go... God said: “I’m good for it. You can trust me. I will keep every promise!” How Jacob must have held onto those words! When days turned into months, and months turned into years, *“I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”*

You know God’s promises. Every single one is going to come true! *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies”* (John 11:25). True! *“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool”* (Isaiah 1:18). True! *“Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 8:38-39). True! This is the answer. The answer to loneliness is not to give up. Your life has a purpose! The answer is not to text me 40 times a day. Don’t! It’s Jesus. You are never alone!

I know you have crosses in your life right now, just like Jesus promised you would. There are struggles and difficulties that the devil uses to try to pull you away from God. For some of us, it’s depression that doesn’t ever seem to go away. What a cross! For some of us, it’s broken relationships, sometimes because of our sin, sometimes because of their sin. What a cross! For some of us, it’s the pain and pressure of family members who don’t believe in Jesus. What a cross! And with every struggle, the devil whispers in your ear: “You’re all alone. You’re the only one. God has given up on you!” But the devil is a liar, and you know the truth. God has a plan for you. God sent a Savior for you. God is always with you. God will keep every promise to you. You are never alone. Tell that again and again to the people you love. With Jesus, you are never alone!

I love what Jacob said after his dream. He woke up and thought: *“Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.”* “Wow! I didn’t think God was with me, but I guess he is!” Jacob called that place “Bethel”—the “house of God.” It’s ironic, because there was no house there. No building at all. God doesn’t need one. You are God’s house. God is with you, and that means that wherever you are, it’s “Bethel”—the house of God. Even if you walk the hallways every day, and no one seems to notice. You are never alone. Even when the guilt sets in, and you can’t imagine anyone loving you. You are never alone. Even if the next great tragedy touches you and your loved ones. You are never alone. “God is in this place. Yes he is!” You are never alone!

**Genesis 28:10-19**  
**Pastor Nathan Nass**

**Second Sunday of Lent**  
**February 25, 2018**

**<sup>10</sup>Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. <sup>11</sup>When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. <sup>12</sup>He had a dream in which he saw a stairway<sup>a</sup> resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. <sup>13</sup>There above it<sup>b</sup> stood the LORD, and he said: “I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. <sup>14</sup>Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. <sup>15</sup>I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” <sup>16</sup>When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” <sup>17</sup>He was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.” <sup>18</sup>Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. <sup>19</sup>He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.**

### **Never Alone!**

“He was a loner. Depressed. Struggled to make friends.” When I say that, who comes to mind? I bet some of you think of the Florida school shooter. That’s how he’s been described, right? “He was a loner. Depressed. Struggled to make friends.” Who else? After our Spanish service last week, some ladies were talking about that shooting, and one lady said, “I know a lot of teens right here in Saint Peter who are struggling just like he was. Who live with a lot of hurt. Who don’t know where to turn. Who feel so alone.” Would you agree? I would. I just don’t think it’s only teens. So many people feel alone. We only notice when something goes terribly wrong.

Did you know that loneliness causes more early deaths in America than obesity? Did you know that since 1985, the number of people who identify themselves as lonely has tripled? You probably don’t need the stats, because you’ve felt it yourself. Alone. It’s ironic that the more technology we have, the lonelier people are. Even with Facebook and text messages, loneliness goes up and up and up. You were made to have deeper conversations than emojis. Remember what God said in the Garden of Eden? *“It is not good for the man to be alone”* (Genesis 2:18). When he made Eve, God didn’t just create marriage. He created friendship. People are not made to be alone.

That was how Jacob felt in our lesson today. Alone. Jacob was fleeing for his life. His own brother, Esau, wanted to kill him. So he had left his parents—Isaac and Rebecca—and set out on a 500-mile journey from Beersheba in the southern part of Israel to Haran in

modern-day Turkey. He hoped to find some relatives whom he had never met and live with them. He was really alone! He walked for miles, until it got dark, and he couldn't see any more. Then he lay down on the bare ground, put a rock under his head, and tried to go to sleep. Can you imagine that? If we feel lonely today, he was really alone! In a strange place. Under the stars. Not even hotel staff to talk to. All alone.

Before we feel too sorry for him, though, there's an important detail we've left out: It was all his fault! Do you remember why Jacob was alone? He had burned all the bridges in his life. The short version is that he had stolen the family blessing from his brother Esau by lying to his father Isaac. That's why he was alone! I'm sure he still felt sorry for himself. We always like to think that we're the victim. But Jacob was alone because of his own sin. As we think about loneliness today, we need to realize how often loneliness is really our own fault. Sin separates. Can you see that in your life?

There was a man who came to the mission church I served in Houston who was lonely. He desperately wanted friends. He called me all the time. He would sometimes send me forty texts in a row. (This is not a good example! Don't do this!) He was so lonely! One day, I was talking with him when his phone rang. He showed me the caller ID. It said, "Don't answer." Then he showed me his contacts in his phone. There were at least 50 contacts for whom he had erased their names and put "Don't answer." "Who are these people?" I asked. "Oh, these are all the people who've hurt me. They want to be my friends, but I'm never going to talk to them again because of what they've done to me." That's why he was alone! Here was a man, desperate for friends. Why? Because he refused to love and forgive and cultivate friendships. Instead, he cut people off.

Sin separates. Can you see that? Every person needs friends and family and encouragement and support. Every single one of us does. But sin separates. Sometimes it's our sin. Our pride pushes people away: "I want a friend, but somebody better than him!" Our lack of forgiveness shuts people out: "She's hurt me one too many times!" What's the result? We're alone. Sin separates. Sometimes, it's someone else's sin. Their refusal to forgive us. Their refusal to love us. Their selfishness or betrayal. The result is the same: Alone. Sometimes it's the results of sin that separate, like death. God created people for each other. What happened? People sinned. And sin separates.

The greatest separation sin brings is between us and God. Do you remember what Adam and Eve did after they sinned? They hid from God! Sin separates. The Bible describes what sin does to our relationship with God: "*Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear*" (Isaiah 59:2). When you are not right with God, you feel it in your heart and you feel it in your soul and there is this emptiness there that nothing else can fill. Our world's loneliness is a proof of sin—my sin, your sin, their sin. Sin separates us from God and each other. Like Jacob. Running from his brother. Running from his sin. Alone.

Except Jacob wasn't alone. "*He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descend-*

*ing on it. There above it stood the LORD.*" Wow. Can you picture this? Led Zeppelin did not invent the stairway to heaven. God did! God wasn't going to let Jacob go through life thinking he was alone. No, not our God! Even as Jacob slept outside by himself with a rock for a pillow in a strange place, he was never alone!

God was there with his arms full of promises. First, he told Jacob that he had a plan for his life. "*I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south.*" Jacob must have thought, "What descendants? I'm all alone! What land? I'm sleeping on a rock!" And God said, "I know. But I still have a plan for you. A plan that's bigger than your wildest dreams. Your life has a purpose. Your life has meaning. You are one day going to come back to this very spot with your family and it will all be yours." God had plans for Jacob.

God has plans for you too. Did you know that? Now, I don't claim to know what they are. But God has plans for you too—every one of you. You are not an accident. You are not the product of random evolution or chance. You are more! You are the child of God, and as long as you have life and breath, God has a plan for you. Sometimes it takes time to see that plan take shape. Do you know how long it took Jacob to get back to this place with his family? Over 20 years. That's a long time! We say a prayer on Sundays, and if it hasn't happened by Tuesday, we think, "What's going on? God never listens. I give up!" Don't give up. God has put you here for a reason! God has a plan!

But God didn't just have a plan for Jacob. He had a plan for the whole world. He told him, "*All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.*" Can you figure that one out? How was Jacob and his offspring a blessing to the whole world? It's simple: God used Jacob's family to bring us Jesus. In fact, Jesus once talked about this very story. He said, "*I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man*" (John 1:51). So who is the stairway to heaven? Jesus! "*I am the way and the truth and the life,*" Jesus said. "*No one comes to the Father except through me*" (John 14:6). God didn't just have a plan for Jacob. He had a plan to save all peoples on earth through faith in Jesus.

So the big question is, are you part of all peoples on earth? Yes? Good! Then you are blessed through Jacob and his descendent—Jesus. When Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world, he died for your sins too! He took away the one thing that separates us from God—our sin—and he opened up the way to heaven through faith in him. Jesus is the stairway to heaven. When you feel guilty, you are forgiven! When you feel rejected, you are loved! When you feel hopeless, you have hope! All in Jesus. I know that life doesn't always make sense. I know you sometimes feel so alone. But God has a plan for you. Just like he has a plan for the world. All in Jesus.

And there's even more! Maybe you can picture Jacob hearing these promises about God's plans for the future, but still thinking, "That's great God. But what about right now? How do I get through tonight?" God wasn't done. He said, "*I am with you and will watch*