Have you ever heard someone make a promise and say, “cross my heart and hope to die.” What is that supposed to mean? (it is an idiom expressing the seriousness and honesty of what is said)

Have you ever pinky promised something? What does that look like? Do you know what that is supposed to mean? (A pinky swear, or pinky promise, is a traditional gesture most commonly practiced amongst children involving the locking of the pinkies of two people to signify that a promise has been made. The gesture is taken to signify that the person can break the finger of the one who broke the promise. The tradition appears to be a relatively modern invention, possibly as a continuation of older finger traditions. wikipedia)

These are some examples of what kids do nowadays to show they mean what they say…but it is often just something said and not necessarily taken seriously. It is basically a simple covenant.

What is a covenant? A covenant is basically a contract in which each person is responsible for something in the agreement. If one of the people does not keep their part of the agreement, there are consequences. So a covenant is serious and not something done quickly without thinking.

An example Matt used of a covenant nowadays is a loan from the bank to buy something like a car. The bank agrees to loan you money with a promise that you will pay it back in a certain amount of time. If you fail to do so, they have the right to come take the car to pay for what you still owe them.

God has made covenants with mankind. These covenants (or promises) show us God’s love for us and His plan to save us.

That brings us to our #TargetPractice for today.

#TargetPractice: How do we know we can trust God’s promises?

Today, we talked about Abraham in the message. What were some promises God gave to Abraham? (I will make you a great nation. I will bless you. And through you, all the families of the earth will be blessed.)

After a stretch of time (25 years) Abraham started wondering if God was going to fulfill His promises. What was the biggest thing he had trouble believing? (he would have children…too old)

To show His seriousness, God made a covenant with Abraham. God had Abraham bring a cow, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon to sacrifice. Abraham killed the animals and split them in half, laying the halves next to each other creating a pathway between them. Now this seems cruel and weird to us, but it was a common practice in

those days to make a covenant (like us doing a pinky promise or signing a contract with the bank.)

That wasn't all they would do though. Each person committing to the covenant would walk in between the halves of the animals. This was their way of saying, "I agree to this covenant and if I don't keep my part of it, may the same thing happen to me!" That's definitely not something you want to do without really making sure you want to keep your part of the deal!!!

Now, back to the covenant with God and Abraham. After preparing the animals, I can imagine that Abraham was waiting to hear the exact details of the covenant and to walk between the animal halves to 'seal the deal.' Instead, God caused Abraham to go into a deep sleep. Abraham then had a vision of God telling him how the land will come to belong to Abraham's family. Then an 'smoking firepot and blazing fire' (signifying God) passed between the pieces.

God was the only one who passed through for the covenant. What did that mean? (God would be held responsible if He Himself or any of Abraham's family did not keep the covenant.)

So, if we use our bank example, God is the bank and just said that if Abraham didn't pay back the loan in a certain time, He would just overlook it. God would take the responsibility.

That is huge! This explains why God forgave Israel later over and over, even though they would continually turn back to worshipping idols. Now that is not to say they didn't get some consequences, but God stuck to His promise to give Abraham's family the land of Canaan. He gave Abraham a son even though Abraham and Sarah were technically too old to have children. God also brought the Messiah (Jesus) to save the world from sin through Abraham's family, which is a blessing to all the nations.

So **How do we know we can trust God's promises?**

God made a covenant with Abraham and kept all of His promises to him. He has also kept other promises as we will continue to see through the next weeks.