

SAMPLE

ALWAYS TRUE

God's Promises When Life Is Hard



**JAMES
MACDONALD**

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THE AUTHOR



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James's teaching can be heard on the daily, 30-minute radio program *Walk in the Word*, which airs across North America. The mission of *Walk in the Word* is to ignite passion in God's people through the proclamation of biblical truth.

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For more information about James and these ministries, visit www.harvestbible.org or www.walkintheword.com.

Other Books by James MacDonald

Always True: God's Five Promises for When Life Is Hard (Moody Publishers, 2011)

Ancient Wisdom (B&H Publishing Group, 2006)

Downpour: He Will Come to Us like the Rain small-group study (LifeWay Press, 2006)

Downpour: He Will Come to Us like the Rain (B&H Publishing Group, 2006)

God Wrote a Book (Crossway Books, 2002)

Gripped by the Greatness of God small-group study (LifeWay Press, 2005)

Gripped by the Greatness of God (Moody Publishers, 2005)

I Really Want to Change . . . So, Help Me God (Moody Publishers, 2000)

Lord, Change My Attitude small-group study (LifeWay Press, 2008)

Lord, Change My Attitude . . . Before It's Too Late (Moody Publishers, 2001)

Seven Words to Change Your Family (Moody Publishers, 2001)

When Life Is Hard small-group study (LifeWay Press, 2010)

When Life Is Hard (Moody Publishers, 2010)

Visit www.lifeway.com/jamesmacdonald for information about James MacDonald resources published by LifeWay.

INTRODUCTION

Always True comes to you life-tested. In the weeks to come, we are going to look at five special and powerful promises of God that have stood the judgment of history. The people who first received these promises and countless others who have followed in their steps could testify, “God has kept His Word. These promises proved true in our lives, and they will always be true.” This study will give you an opportunity to personally test God’s promises by applying them to the problems and trials you are experiencing in your life.

Here are the promises we will study.

1. I will not fear; God is always with me.
2. I will not doubt; God is always in control.
3. I will not despair; God is always good.
4. I will not falter; God is always watching.
5. I will not fail; God is always victorious.

In the first week of our study we will look at God as the great Promise Keeper. Because He is trustworthy, we can trust His promises. Then in weeks 2–6 we will look at the five promises to learn how they will change our perspective on our life circumstances.

The apostle Peter wrote that God has “granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire” (2 Pet. 1:4). If we take God’s promises to heart, we will find them to be our greatest resources for fighting the battles of this life and for embracing a walk of ever-growing faith. When God’s promises prove to be effective and true, they become precious to us.

No matter what you are going through, your situation would look very different in the light of God’s promises. Get to know the great promises in God’s Word. When life is hard, you can count on them to be always true.

How to Get the Most from This Study

1. **Attend each group experience.**
 - Watch the DVD teaching.
 - Participate in the group discussion.
2. **Complete the daily assignments in this workbook.**
 - Read the material.
 - Complete the learning activities.
 - Memorize each week’s memory verse. Scripture-memory cards are provided at the back.
 - Watch for God to fulfill His promises in your life.

Week 1

THE THEOLOGY OF PROMISE

God's Promises

I will not fear; God is always with me.

I will not doubt; God is always in control.

I will not despair; God is always good.

I will not falter; God is always watching.

I will not fail; God is always victorious.

This Week's Memory Verses

“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.”

2 Peter 1:3-4



It's All About God

Niagara Falls is the honeymoon capital of the world. Each year thousands of newlyweds visit this breathtaking site to celebrate their marriages. One of the most magnificent sites, Horseshoe Falls, is 2,600 feet around the rim and 167 feet high. More than six hundred thousand gallons of water flow over the falls every second.

God has said in His Word,

“Deep calls to deep
at the roar of your waterfalls;
all your breakers and your waves
have gone over me.” *Psalm 42:7*

Scripture frequently paints vivid pictures like this to proclaim God's creative power. God literally spoke the universe into existence. We're about to study five of God's very great promises, so it's appropriate that we begin with a reminder of His creative majesty. If God has the power to speak and form the universe, He has the power to keep all of the promises He has made to us in His Word.

In this first week we will focus on the theology of God's promises. *Theology* means *words about God* or *God words*, so *theology of promise* means we will examine God's words about His promises. This means we will learn not only what God says about His promises but also what God's promises tell us about Him. If we want to understand the theology of promise, we have to start with God.

Think of God's promises as an all-access backstage pass to Scripture's greatest treasures, giving you a behind-the-curtain view of God's plans for the Christian walk. They will be your light when the way is darkest. They will produce hope, strength, and confidence to lift your heavy burdens. When nothing else makes sense, these promises will literally hold you up and carry you forward to better days that are coming. I am assured of this because the promises come from God Himself. That's why our first week of study will focus on the character of the God who stands behind the promises. A guarantee doesn't mean much unless the party issuing the guarantee has the resources to deliver what was promised. Believe me: God can deliver. He is reliable. He is eternal. He is faithful. Therefore, His promises are always true.

Week 1

GROUP EXPERIENCE

On the Same Page

If you are meeting as a group for the first time, introduce one another. Share your responses to the following.

- Identify groups, organizations, and institutions that are known for not being trustworthy.
- List promotional messages you see or hear that instantly cause you to think, *That can't be true.*
- Share examples of broken promises in today's culture that you have observed or experienced.

Preparation

1. When you heard this study would examine God's promises, what was the first thought that went through your mind?
2. What promises of God already hold special meaning for you?
3. Together read aloud this week's memory verses on page 6.

DVD Session 1 Viewer Guide

God is by nature a _____.

Promise: an assurance God gives His people so that they can _____ by _____ while they wait for Him to _____.

God's promises are _____ (see 2 Pet. 1:3-4).

1. God's promises come from a great _____.
2. God's promises cover the great _____.
3. God's promises bring us great _____.
4. God's promises lead to a great _____.

God's promises are _____ great (see 2 Pet. 1:3-4).

1. Greater than _____
2. Greater than white-knuckled _____
3. Greater than _____ in self-pity

God's promises are exceedingly great and _____ (see 2 Pet. 1:3-4).

Precious things take:

1. _____
2. _____

Two kinds of promises in the Bible:

1. A _____ covenant
 2. An _____ covenant
- Covenant: a sworn _____ between two parties

God is a _____.

God _____ His promises.

God wants us to _____ His promises.

Don't act _____ and expect God to _____ you out.
Don't act _____ and provoke God to _____ you.

God's promises are activated by _____.

The promise is never real to you until:

1. You _____ it.
2. You _____ it.
3. You _____ it.

God's promises are experienced in _____.

Responding to the DVD Teaching

1. In what ways would you say God is precious to you today?
2. Look at the definition of *promise* in your viewer guide (p. 8).
How would you express that definition in your own words?
3. What examples can you think of in your own experiences of the
"Today I believe; tomorrow I receive" principle?

Read week 2 and complete the activities before the next group experience. Read and recite this week's memory verses, 2 Peter 1:3-4, at least once each day this week.

This video session is available for download at www.lifeway.com/alwaystrue.

Day 1

GOD MAKES PROMISES

Today's Scripture Focus

“He has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.”

2 Peter 1:4

I remember with stark vividness some incredibly dark days. With trembling hands and a desperate heart, I began to search the Scriptures, knowing I could grope my way to the light if I could just find some promises to hold on to. God's Word is like a mountain of gold, and when we dig in the mountain, we continually discover His promises shining like diamonds.

Read the following examples of promises God has made to us in His Word. Check any that speak to needs in your life at this time.

“Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.” *Deuteronomy 31:6*

“They who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” *Isaiah 40:31*

“I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” *Jeremiah 29:11*

“If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” *John 14:14*

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” *John 14:27*

“My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” *Philippians 4:19*

God's Word is like a mountain of gold, and when we dig in the mountain, we continually discover His promises shining like diamonds.

“For those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” *Romans 8:28*

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” *1 John 1:9*

God Is a Promiser

The Bible reveals a God who makes promises. He is a promiser by nature. A general definition of *promise* is *a declaration of what someone will do*. A promise from God is an assurance He gives His people that enables them to walk by faith while they wait for Him to work. With a promise God first gives us a picture of what will come about. Then He gives us the real thing. He tells us what He is going to do, and then He does what He said He would do. In the meantime our job is to walk by faith in what God has promised to do. Today we believe; tomorrow we receive. When God promises something, you can believe and act on it.

The very idea that God commits Himself to do anything is incredible. He doesn't have to bind Himself to us in any way. He is God—completely above and beyond us. Yet He promises to do certain things for us. And He has recorded those promises in His Word to give us hope no matter what trials and hardships we are going through. Even when it's hard to trust God during these times, His promises remain the same. Nothing can change God's stated intent. He has not left us wondering what is going to happen, uncertain about the future, or overcome by fear. He has given us promises as assurances of the outcomes of those dark and difficult times when life is hard.

Check the statement that most closely describes the way you relate to God's promises.

- God's promises are hopeful ideas that make me feel good.
- God's promises are for others, not for me.
- God's promises are central to the way I live my life.
- God's promises are something I rarely think about.

Are you accustomed to looking at God's promises as an assurance—a sure thing? How does this perspective affect your confidence in God's Word?

How do you think God's promises help believers walk by faith?

**Today we believe;
tomorrow we receive.**

Every moment of the Christian journey is a walk of faith. When you walk by faith, you believe there will be a day when God will fulfill His Word. All that stands between you and what He has promised is time. His promises give us something to hang on to during the long wait. The hardest part of hanging on is the gap between believing His promise and receiving the fulfillment of that promise. The Christian life would be easy if the time were short between our appeal to God's promises and our receiving what He promised. But life isn't like that. We have to wait without knowing the outcome or how long the wait will be.

**What trials or difficulties are you waiting through now?
How are they affecting your faith in God?**

What role are God's promises playing during your wait?

God's promises allow us to hang on to His Word.

The wait is where God's promises come in. We must review His promises all the time. We must remind ourselves that our faith is in God and not in what He does for us. He knows what He has promised. He can't lie, and He can't forget. He will deliver on time all the time. His promises allow us to hang on to His Word. While we wait, we learn to trust God, and He builds our faith.

In general, we can classify God's promises in Scripture as foundational or functional. Foundational promises apply to God's plans for history and all humankind. Functional promises, on the other hand, are those we can apply to our personal lives and our walk with Christ.

Read the following verses and indicate whether they represent foundational or functional promises.

| | | |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Genesis 3:15 | <input type="checkbox"/> Foundational | <input type="checkbox"/> Functional |
| Genesis 9:11 | <input type="checkbox"/> Foundational | <input type="checkbox"/> Functional |
| Genesis 12:2-3 | <input type="checkbox"/> Foundational | <input type="checkbox"/> Functional |
| John 3:16 | <input type="checkbox"/> Foundational | <input type="checkbox"/> Functional |
| Philippians 4:19 | <input type="checkbox"/> Foundational | <input type="checkbox"/> Functional |
| James 1:12 | <input type="checkbox"/> Foundational | <input type="checkbox"/> Functional |

Precious and Great Promises

Today's Scripture focus, 2 Peter 1:4, says God "has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire."

What two adjectives did Peter use to describe God's promises?

What is the goal of God's promises in a believer's life?

God's promises are great. God's promises are great because they come from a great God. Jeremiah 32:27 quotes God as saying, "I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?" Sometimes we look at our need or our overwhelming circumstance and feel defeated. However, our promise-keeping God says, "Nothing is too hard for Me." Holding on to God's promises is the next best thing to holding on to God.

God's promises are great because they address the great issues—life, sin, death, good, evil, fear, despair, hope, purpose. You can search the Bible for answers to the biggest issues you will ever face.

God's promises are greater than anything else available to us. They are greater than human wisdom. Proverbs 18:2 says,

"A fool takes no pleasure in understanding,
but only in expressing his opinion."

When it comes down to it, human wisdom is just a matter of our own opinions. But God has spoken, and He has made promises to those who choose to love and trust Him. We need to get on board with what He has promised in His Word.

God's promises are greater than white-knuckled obedience. Have you ever been hit with a problem so big that all you can think to do is hang on? *I'm going to get through this. If I can just hang on, this is going to work itself out.* Rather than endure our trials like an endless marathon, we can rely on God's promises to give us peace and confidence during the wait.

God's promises are greater than wallowing in self-pity. Some people get hit with a wave of difficulty that is followed by a tsunami of self-pity. That's an

Holding on to God's promises is the next best thing to holding on to God.

understandable initial reaction, but after that we need to rise to the surface, take hold of the promises of God, and ride those waves to shore.

God's promises are precious. *Precious* is not a kindergarten word. When you're young, you don't know what is valuable. But the older you get, the more you realize that precious takes time.

Read the following verses and write the things or people Peter described as precious.

1 Peter 1:7:

1 Peter 1:19:

1 Peter 2:4:

1 Peter 2:6:

Peter used the word *precious* to describe what is most valuable in the kingdom of God. As we believe and act on God's great and precious promises, He leads us out of sin to become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4), the righteous character of Christ.

Owning God's Promises

Beginning in week 2, we will study five major promises God has made.

1. I will not fear; God is always with me.
2. I will not doubt; God is always in control.
3. I will not despair; God is always good.
4. I will not falter; God is always watching.
5. I will not fail; God is always victorious.

Underline the promise above that you find most reassuring at this time in your life.

These five promises all require responses from us. We have to be willing to let them work in our lives. This is why we must set aside our expectations of instant gratification when it comes to God's promises. We actively trust a promise and then wait for God to follow through on that promise. Today we believe; tomorrow (or at some point in the future) we receive. God determines the timing of His promises; we don't.

God determines the timing of His promises; we don't.

I wish I could tell you God's promises always work out perfectly in our lifetimes, but that isn't always the case. God's promises are not just for this life. You must factor eternity into the equation. Heaven will bring the whole story together.

David made a powerful statement of faith in Psalm 27:13 (NKJV):

“I would have lost heart, unless I had believed
That I would see the goodness of the LORD
In the land of the living.”

Some promises are for heaven, beyond this life. We may want to see them now; only then are we going to see them. But notice that David didn't hang his hopes on a particular promise and hold God to a narrow expectation: “Unless You do this specific thing for me, God, I won't keep trusting You.” He opened his eyes wide to let God show him His goodness “in the land of the living.”

Hebrews 6:11-12 tells us we must persevere in light of God's promises: “We desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” God doesn't want one person to quit. He puts promises in our hands so that we can grow in our faith, demonstrating the authenticity of a life lived in Christ.

God puts promises in our hands so that we can grow in our faith.

What hardships and trials are you struggling with?

Would observers be able to say you are striving with earnestness and with the full assurance of hope? Yes No

Pray and ask God to use this study to increase your faith as you learn to trust His promises.

Begin memorizing this week's memory verses, 2 Peter 1:3-4. Scripture-memory cards are provided at the back of your workbook.

Day 2

GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES

Today's Scripture Focus

“We desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, ‘Surely I will bless you and multiply you.’ And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.”

Hebrews 6:11-18

Today's Scripture focus gives us not only a central promise of Scripture but also insight into the character of the One behind the promise—God Himself. If we are continually moving toward a clearer understanding of God as He has revealed Himself in Scripture, we can experience the assurance His promises were designed to bring about in our lives. The solid foundation on which the Christian life rests is the conviction that God will keep His promises. In our walk with Christ, we need to keep going—keep loving, serving, obeying—until we get what God promised. We don't have all He promised yet. In fact, we don't have even the smallest fraction of it. There is so much yet to come. We have to press on and wait in faith, and someday He will fulfill all He said He would do.

The solid foundation on which the Christian life rests is the conviction that God will keep His promises.

The Ultimate Promise Keeper

You and I may have the most noble of intentions, but our best promise means “I want to; I intend to; I'll try my best.” Only time will tell whether we keep our promise. It's not like that with God. When God promises, He's not saying, “I'll try.” He means “I can, and I will!” Who else can say that? A well-intentioned home buyer takes out a loan but may not make good on it. The bank tries to insure the loan, but as our nation learned during the first decade of the 21st century, even large financial institutions can't always come through on what they commit to do.

Identify a time when you were not able to keep a promise you made to someone or someone failed to keep a promise to you.

What caused the failure to follow through?

We can't allow our disappointments with the uncertainties of living in a fallen world to destroy the assurance we have in God. When all around us people are breaking their word, we can hold on to the truth that God keeps His promises!

We can't allow our disappointments with the uncertainties of living in a fallen world to destroy the assurance we have in God.

Read the following pairs of verses. Record the way God's promise in the first verse(s) of the pair was fulfilled in the second verse(s) of the pair.

Scriptures

Fulfillment

Genesis 12:1-3; Joshua 21:43

2 Samuel 6:12-13; Luke 2:11

Jeremiah 29:10; Ezra 1:1-4

Acts 1:8; 2:1-4

Inheriting the Promises

In the Old Testament many promises God made to people were known as covenants. A covenant is a formal promise. The Bible contains two kinds of covenant promises.

1. A conditional covenant includes our part and God's part. We do our part; then God does His. The Mosaic covenant given in Exodus 19–24, including the Ten Commandments, is an example of a conditional promise. In short, God said, "If you obey Me, you will be blessed. If you disobey, you will be judged."
2. An unconditional covenant involves only God. He carries the weight of both parties. God says, "I'm going to make this promise based on My character alone. You don't have to do anything." We don't have to meet any conditions to realize this promise.

Read Genesis 12:1-3 and underline God's promises to Abraham.

"The LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great,

so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you,
and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you
all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ ”

Which type of covenant was this? Conditional Unconditional

The covenant between God and Abraham was an unconditional covenant. God chose a people for Himself while only the future father of the nation was there to witness God’s promise.

A covenant is a serious commitment. The word *covenant* actually means *to make a cut*. In the Old Testament the two parties involved in the covenant had a ceremony. They took a sacrificial animal, killed it, and cut it in half lengthwise. Then they separated the animal on the ground, stood between the two halves, shook hands, and swore that whatever they had committed to do would be done, sealing the deal. When God made an unconditional covenant with Abraham, He went through the whole ceremony by Himself. He put Abraham to sleep and stood alone between the pieces of the sacrificial animal, signifying that He would fulfill this commitment no matter what Abraham did (see Gen. 15:1-21).

In our Scripture focus today the writer of Hebrews used the covenant with Abraham as an example of God’s faithfulness that we can depend on. Abraham hung on to God’s promise, patiently walking by faith, and saw God working out His word through his son Isaac and his place in the promised land. “Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise” (Heb. 6:15).

Hebrews 6:17-18 says God guaranteed His promise to Abraham with an oath tied to “two unchangeable things”:

1. His character—who God is
2. His Word—what God says

Because of the unchangeable nature of God’s character and His Word, God’s promise to Abraham could not change. The same is true of His promises to us—all of the promises in His Word. In our human nature it’s hard for us even to imagine unchangeable. We’ve never experienced anything so secure and solid. Jesus told us, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Matt. 24:35). No one but God can make a claim like that—and keep it! These are unchangeable words from an unchangeable God: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

Because of the unchangeable nature of God’s character and His Word, God’s promise to Abraham could not change.

How do these unchangeable things give you confidence in God's promises?

God's unchanging character:

God's unchanging Word:

Check the areas of life in which you are patiently waiting to see God work out His promises.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personal spiritual life | <input type="checkbox"/> Ministry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marriage | <input type="checkbox"/> Church |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family life | <input type="checkbox"/> Trial or hardship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vocation | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: | |

Describe the way you are exercising faith in at least one of these areas as you wait for God to keep His promises.

In giving us His promises, God wants us to show “the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:11-12). Like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, we can look with faith to the time God’s promises come true.

We can look with faith to the time God's promises come true.

God is not only able but also willing to keep His promises to us.

Read Romans 8:32 and underline what God desires to give us.

“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”

Identify a specific issue or problem in your life for which you need a promise.

Ask God to show you a Scripture promise that speaks to this issue.

Write it here.

Claim this verse as God's promise to you. Ask God to give you faith in His character and His Word as you wait for Him to keep His promise.

Work on your memory verses for this week, 2 Peter 1:3-4.

Day 3

GOD WANTS US TO TEST HIS PROMISES

Today's Scripture Focus

"Your promise is well tried,
and your servant loves it." *Psalms 119:140*

"Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made
to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass." *Joshua 21:45*

"Blessed be the LORD who has given rest to his people Israel, according
to all that he promised. Not one word has failed of all his good
promise, which he spoke by Moses his servant." *1 Kings 8:56*

If you are a regular radio listener, you are used to those occasional interruptions that say, "The following is a test of the emergency broadcast system. . . . This is only a test." You may have lived your entire life without ever hearing that announcement changed to "This is the emergency broadcast system. This is not a test; it is a real emergency!" Although we may not appreciate having our favorite song or program interrupted, we recognize the value of testing a system that was designed to alert us in case of an emergency.

Our Scripture focus for today reminds us that God's promises are designed to be tested. They are tried commitments, meaning that when they were needed, they proved dependable. The background of the word *try*, when used in this sense, includes a technical term from forging that described the process of testing a metal for purity and strength. This is the beautiful meaning of the word *tried* in a comforting verse like Job 23:10:

"He knows the way that I take;
when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold."

We don't have to come up with artificial breaks in our programming to test God's promises. Life will present us with plenty of real-life moments when we can observe ways God lives up to His Word. If we are watching, we will be able to say with the psalmist,

**God's promises are
designed to be tested.**

“Your promise is well tried,
and your servant loves it.” *Psalm 119:140*

When we make promises, we often include some unspoken small print that is filled with *if* clauses: *I will do this if the creek doesn't rise, if I feel like it, if it doesn't interfere with other plans, if I don't get a better offer, if there aren't unexpected complications.* That's one way we are different from God. He already knows there will be real difficulties, but He makes His promises anyway. He doesn't make promises you won't need. He expects you to be at a crossroads where you have to lean on Him; where you must rest on His promises; and where you are ready to claim them, hold them, and treasure them in your heart. God flat-out wants you to test His promises.

**Identify one of God's promises you have tried in your life.
How would you describe the outcome of that test?**

**God doesn't
make promises
you won't need.**

Every person who knows and loves the Lord will experience circumstances in which they have no option but to put God's promises to the test. There's simply nowhere else to turn. Every other prop is going to be removed until we can go forward only on our confidence in God's promises. Every time we test those promises, God will prove Himself true.

Tried Promises

The biblical account of Israel's journey to the promised land contains multiple examples of God's faithfulness to His promises. After the miraculous delivery from Egypt and the 40-year training tour through the wilderness, the people had finally entered the land. Moses had passed off the scene, and his replacement, Joshua, reminded the people of the many promises that had proved true along the way: "Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass" (Josh. 21:45). Realizing there was still a lot of work to do to possess the land, Joshua understood that when he was gone from the scene, the diligence of the people might flag. He wanted to remind them that God had been faithful to His promises and assured them they could go forward confident of His continued faithfulness. He issued this challenge: "If it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Josh. 24:15).

Many years later Solomon, a son of David, had inherited and consolidated the kingdom of Israel in the largest and most settled form it would ever achieve. The hard-fought victories of David had left Solomon with a kingdom of peace. As Solomon dedicated the great temple in Jerusalem, he proclaimed God's fulfillment of all of His promises: "Blessed be the LORD who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised. Not one word has failed of all his good promise, which he spoke by Moses his servant" (1 Kings 8:56). Solomon described the nation's current condition as rest that God had promised and provided to His people. The king then looked to a future he hoped would be marked by obedience to God (see 1 Kings 8:54-61) and acknowledged God's global purposes in fulfilling His promises for His chosen people: "that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no other" (1 Kings 8:60).

Underline the phrase in both verses that describes the standard of accuracy with which God fulfilled His promises to His chosen people.

"Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass." *Joshua 21:45*

"Blessed be the LORD who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised. Not one word has failed of all his good promise, which he spoke by Moses his servant." *1 Kings 8:56*

There wasn't one instance when Joshua or Solomon could look back and say, "Well, that didn't turn out quite the way God said it would." History had unfolded exactly the way God declared it would. The people had tested God's promises, and not one word had failed.

Testing God's Promises

When we think about testing God's promises, we might fall into the error of picturing ourselves as lab technicians overseeing grand experiments in which we have God's Word under a microscope. That's the wrong picture. Our lives are the lab. Our lives are proof of the Word of God. There is a massive experiment under way in which all of us are participating. Is God's Word true? Does it bear itself out in our lives?

In its totality God's Word is a bunch of promises and consequences. God said in Deuteronomy 11:26-28, "See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, ... and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God." One way or another we prove the Word of God. If you obey, you will be blessed.

**Our lives are proof
of the Word of God.**

Your life is proof of that promise. If you disobey, you will be judged. Your life is proof of this consequence.

Try to identify at least one experience in your life that tested each of the following kinds of promises God has given in His Word.

Promises of protection (see Ps. 23; 37:25; 1 Pet. 5:7):

Promises of provision (see Ps. 84:11; Rom. 8:32; Phil. 4:19):

Promises of perseverance (see Isa. 30:18; 40:31; Rom. 8:37-39):

At this point you may be thinking, *James, you're saying God invites us to test His promises, but didn't Jesus tell Satan, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test" (Matt. 4:7)?* Good question, and I'm glad for the chance to clarify. Jesus' warning not to put God to the test means two things.

1. Don't act foolishly and expect God to bail you out. In Matthew 4 Satan was tempting Jesus to jump from the pinnacle of the temple to see whether God would send angels to catch Him. Sounds like something junior-high boys might do rather than the Son of God. If Jesus had fallen for that ploy, not only would He have made a rash move, but He would have also revealed doubt about His own identity. The dare from the Devil was "If you are the Son of God . . ." Jesus didn't have to prove something He already knew.

Some people take one of God's promises and push it to the limit. Take, for instance, His promise to meet our needs in Philippians 4:19: "My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." God promises that, as a believer, you will never lack the basic provisions of life—food, shelter, and clothing. One way or another God will take care of those. Some people twist His promise and say, "Well, then, let's sell the house. Let's give away all our money. Torch the car, and let's go sit in a field. Take care of me *now*, God!" Not testing God means not to act foolishly and then expect God to bail you out.

God promises that, as a believer, you will never lack the basic provisions of life.

Don't put God to the threat test.

2. *Don't act willfully and provoke God to judge you for rebellion and ungratefulness.* When Jesus responded to Satan in Matthew 4, he was quoting Deuteronomy 6:16: "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah." Massah, which means *testing*, was a place where the Israelites camped (see Ex. 17) after God had brought them out of Egypt, out of slavery, and out of harm's way. Although He fed them every day with bread from heaven, one day the group woke up and went ballistic because there was a temporary water shortage. Moses was afraid for his life as the people turned against God.

Here's a warning: don't *ever* do that. Don't put God to the threat test. Don't disregard every good thing He has done for you, turn rebellious and ungrateful, and whine, "But I *have* to have this, God. If You don't fix this situation, You're not God. You don't care about me." Don't put it all on the line over one thing and demand that God work right now. When we try this, we are not depending on God so much as we are trying to demonstrate just how much influence we have with Him. Ordering God around is not going to turn out well for us. Even if He graciously intervenes, as He did with the Israelites at Massah, we will find it almost impossible to be grateful.

God doesn't want us to put Him to the test—His character, His compassion, His purposes—but he wants us to test His promises. Why? Because He wants us to know for certain—from experience—that what He promises is true. When we learn that lesson, we are better able to walk in faith.

Identify a trial or problem you are experiencing that would allow you to test God's promises.

Spend time in prayer, thanking God for the promises that have proved true in your life. Praise Him as the great Promise Keeper whose Word stands up to anything we face in life. Ask Him to help you step out in faith on the promises He has given for any trials or problems you are experiencing.

Practice saying this week's memory verses, 2 Peter 1:3-4.

Day 4

GOD'S PROMISES ARE ACTIVATED BY FAITH

Today's Scripture Focus

"He did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief."

Matthew 13:58

"You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.

You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions." *James 4:2-3*

Sometimes we think things would be different if Jesus were still here on earth. What do you really think would happen if Jesus showed up in your neighborhood? It's easy to think, *If Jesus were here, things would be different. Miracles would happen. People would be changed. More people would be willing to believe in Him.* Matthew 13:58 tells us, "Not necessarily."

The Obstacle of Unbelief

Jesus had come back home to Nazareth, His base for ministry when He was in the north of Israel. In the previous chapter Jesus was elsewhere teaching and healing when His mother and brothers showed up to intervene. We don't know what they planned to tell Jesus, but it's probably safe to say Mary was concerned for her son, and His brothers just wanted to tell Him something like "What are You thinking?" In any case Jesus let them know that His standard for prioritizing relationships in His life was as follows: "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matt. 12:50). He wasn't rejecting them; He was simply clarifying their relationship.

When Jesus returned to Nazareth, He tried to continue His ministry of teaching, but the locals, who thought they knew Him, didn't believe He could be what He seemed. In Matthew 13:54-56 they basically passed around the high-school yearbook and said, "See? This is Mary's Son. Remember? Here are all of His brothers and sisters. We know Him. Who does He think he is?" Verse 57 expresses it this way: "They took offense at him." Familiarity bred contempt. Their question was "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works?" (v. 54). But they weren't looking for an answer; they were asking as a way

The locals, who thought they knew Jesus, didn't believe He could be what He seemed.

of saying they rejected Him. Jesus didn't argue with them. He simply pointed out, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household" (v. 57). At that point Matthew added the sad note that Jesus "did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief" (v. 58). Though Jesus' family and neighbors already knew about Jesus' teaching and mighty works, they were unwilling to believe.

Check any works you or others in your church have asked God to do, but He has not acted.

- Lord, why don't You do more in and through our church?
- You do so many good things for my friend. Why don't You bless me that way?
- Why won't You heal my loved one's illness?
- Other:

Many of us are familiar with Jesus and what He can do. Not nearly as many of us can report that God's promises are coming true in our lives. Why is this? Just like the people of Nazareth, we've got a problem with unbelief. Unbelief is an obstacle in a Christian's spiritual walk. God's promises are activated by faith.

Maybe you know all about a weight-loss plan. You might be able to list the foods, the calories, and the exercise plan, but you won't lose weight unless you follow the plan. You can be familiar with a piece of music, but it's not yours until you play it. A doctor's prescription can match your illness perfectly, but until you swallow the medicine, it's not going to make any difference in your health.

You've got to take God's promises by faith. Only then will you experience for yourself why they have satisfied generations of faithful men and women who have trusted God's Word.

Check the areas of your life in which you need to exercise faith in God's promises.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marriage | <input type="checkbox"/> Family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Physical or emotional illness | <input type="checkbox"/> Career |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spiritual growth | <input type="checkbox"/> Relationships |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Witnessing to others | <input type="checkbox"/> Grief |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ministering to others | <input type="checkbox"/> Depression |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: | |

You've got to take God's promises by faith.

Activating Your Faith

God's promises are activated by faith. Faith is not passive; it's an action word. If you say, "I'm waiting for God to act. Maybe He will work; maybe He won't," you are acting like a sick guy who needs to get better but won't go to the doctor. Or like a single woman who is looking for a husband but never goes to the single-adult group at church. Or people who are filled with worry and want to have hope but never read the Bible. They might carry it and respect it and defend it, but they're not drinking from the Word of life like someone thirsting in a desert. They're not living in it and believing God's promises for their needs.

James wrote, "You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions" (Jas. 4:2-3). If you aren't seeing God work in your situation, get your heart around some of His exceedingly great and precious promises. Hold on to what He has said in His Word. If you have God's promises hidden in your heart, His words will fill your life with faith.

Read the story of Naaman in 2 Kings 5:1-14 and answer these questions.

Why was Naaman at first unwilling to follow Elisha's instructions?

What does this story tell us about placing faith in God's word?

Identify an area of your life in which you have not been willing to search for God's promise and act in faith on it.

Here are three ways we can actively rely on God's promises.

See the promises. Bible studies can teach you a lot about God's Word, but no Bible study can replace your personal reading of God's Word. Persistently and consistently read the Bible. Examine it closely and apply it rigorously. There's something unforgettable about discovering one of God's promises on your own as the Holy Spirit opens your eyes. It's like a light going on.

If you have God's promises hidden in your heart, His words will fill your life with faith.

Part of seeing a Bible promise is to understand it in context. Some promises are unique to particular situations and individuals. Others are universal, applying to all people at all times.

Read the following verses and indicate whether they are unique or universal.

| | | |
|---------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Judges 13:3-5 | <input type="checkbox"/> Unique | <input type="checkbox"/> Universal |
| Psalms 23:4 | <input type="checkbox"/> Unique | <input type="checkbox"/> Universal |
| Isaiah 43:2 | <input type="checkbox"/> Unique | <input type="checkbox"/> Universal |
| Luke 1:31 | <input type="checkbox"/> Unique | <input type="checkbox"/> Universal |

The promises God made, for example, to Samson's parents and to Mary applied only to their circumstances. However, you can take hold of the promises God has universally guaranteed to all of His children, asking God to open your eyes to their universal truth as well as their particular relevance for your life.

Read Isaiah 43:2.

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.”

In what circumstances would you apply this verse to your life?

Savor the promises. If you want to experience God's promises for yourself, you've got to feed on them with your mind. Learn to treasure them in your heart. Allow them to nourish your soul. The law that the wise person in Psalm 1 meditates on day and night is flavored with God's promises. Tasting and seeing that the Lord is good also has a lot to do with living with His promises:

“Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!” *Psalms 34:8*

As you pray a scriptural promise, expect it and believe it as already accomplished.

Savoring God's promises involves rolling them over and through your mind as you would savor the taste of delicious food in your mouth. As you pray a scriptural promise, expect it and believe it as already accomplished. Thank God in faith that it is already happening. I often pray a promise like this: “Even though it's not visual to me, God, by faith I believe Your Word. I believe You are

at work today bringing this about. You said You're with me, so I believe it. I'm expecting You to make a way even though I can't see it up ahead." Because they are certain, God's promises give you permission to visualize the done deal.

Read Psalm 27:13.

"I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living!"

**After meditating on this verse, identify what specific goodness
you long to see in the land of the living.**

Share the promises. As you discover promises for your trials or needs, share them with others. Don't worry about appearing to be a spiritual giant. Give God the credit and invite others to share in the benefits of God's promises. Also report to others how God is fulfilling His promises in your life. Get excited when other people see, savor, and share God's promises.

Read Romans 10:9.

"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

Who in your life needs to hear that promise today?

**Pray for opportunities to share the salvation of Jesus with the person(s)
you named. Ask God for opportunities to share His promises with others.**

Write this week's memory verses, 2 Peter 1:3-4, here from memory.

**Report to others how
God is fulfilling His
promises in your life.**

Day 5

GOD'S PROMISES ARE EXPERIENCED IN JESUS CHRIST

Today's Scripture Focus

"All the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory." *2 Corinthians 1:20*

You are standing outside your favorite store when someone who knows you very well hands you an envelope and says, "I've decided to bless you today. I know you and what you want and need. In this envelope is a lengthy list of everything in this store that I'm prepared to give you. You can't afford any of this yourself, but I'm offering it all to you. Ask for anything on the list, and I'll say yes."

There are two actions you can take right after you say, "Thank you very much!" You can tear open the envelope and use it as a shopping list, or you can take your amazing friend into the store with you and walk up and down the aisles, carrying the unopened envelope as you continually ask, "Can I have this? Can I have that?" Because you would be guessing, sometimes the answer would be "Yes, that's on the list." But often the answer would be "No, that's not on the list."

So why not tear open the envelope and look at the list?

Second Corinthians 1:20, today's Scripture focus, begins, "All the promises of God find their Yes in him," that is, in Jesus. We can stumble through our lives wondering whether God would grant us what we want and need, but the reality is that these things are already on the list.

Read Ephesians 1:3 and 2 Peter 1:3.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." *Ephesians 1:3*

"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence." *2 Peter 1:3*

Check the things God has already promised us.

- Material wealth
- Good health
- Resources for godly living
- Spiritual blessings
- An earthly kingdom
- Life in Christ

Because we have life in Christ, God has promised to supply every spiritual blessing and everything we need for godly living. Every promise we will savor in this study and every promise you discover in God’s Word will be experienced in, guaranteed by, and delivered through Jesus Christ. God’s promises are wrapped up in Jesus Christ. Romans 11:36 says of Him, “From him and through him and to him are all things.” Jesus Christ is the promise of God.

Jesus Christ is the promise of God.

Christ in You

This may come as a shock to you, but it is impossible for you to live the Christian life. You can’t do it on your own. The Christian life isn’t something you do. The Christian life is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

When you accepted Christ as your Savior and Lord, you died. “I have been crucified with Christ,” Galatians 2:20 teaches. “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Jesus is your life. It’s not trying to please the Lord or impress Him or imitate Him. The Christian life is all about yielding to the living presence of Christ in you by His Spirit.

Mark the point on the scale that represents your ability to allow Christ to live His life through you.



Doing and performing

Yielding to Christ's living presence in me

If the Christian life for you is acting like Jesus, that’s just religion. Performing and trying to be a Christian gets stale, ritualistic, and exhausting after a while. Pretty soon we throw everything up in the air and say, “I can’t do all this!” Correct. He never said we could. Instead, *He* is the Christian life.

You may be wondering what it looks like in the Christian life to let Jesus live through you: *How can I let Jesus do it when the Bible tells me to obey so many commands?* Let’s look at I Thessalonians 5:16-22 to get a picture of our dilemma:

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.”

At first blush this passage looks like a grocery list of all the stuff we have to do in the Christian life. Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances. Like a juggler trying to keep all of the balls in the air, maybe we just need to get more skillful in the Christian life, add more disciplines, get more dedicated, and increase our capacity for doing even more. But that’s not it at all. Look at the next two verses:

“May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (vv. 23-24).

Jesus doesn’t just call us to it. He does it. We can’t sanctify ourselves. It is Jesus who makes us “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4). We can’t walk and work by faith. “It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). Once again, Jesus Christ *is* the Christian life. For everything you can’t do, He will surely do it.

What is a specific problem or situation that has you feeling helpless and clueless about what to do?

Maybe your problem is a seeming inability to live in the power and wisdom of Christ. Confess any attempts you have made to fix things in your own power. Then ask Jesus to help you withstand temptation, endure a trial, be faithful to persevere, and yield to His indwelling presence.

Every Promise Is Yours

What we have observed about life in Christ gives us a foundation for understanding how He grants us the promises in God’s Word. Just as we can’t make ourselves godly or obedient in the Christian life, we can’t access the promises of God on our own. You see, Jesus doesn’t give us the promises. He gives us Himself. When we receive Him, we receive every promise in Scripture.

When we receive Jesus, we receive every promise in Scripture.

Let's look at each of the five promises we are going to study in weeks 2–6 and discover their source in Jesus Christ.

1. *I will not fear; God is always with me.* Specifically, it's Jesus who is with us: "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). Christ's presence in our lives takes away fear.

2. *I will not doubt; God is always in control.* Hebrews 1:3 says Jesus "upholds the universe by the word of his power." As the instrument of God's sovereignty, Jesus holds the whole world in His hands. Christ's sovereignty gives us assurance and calmness in the face of doubts.

3. *I will not despair; God is always good.* Jesus, who said, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11), protects and takes care of His sheep. Christ's goodness renews us when we are weighed down by despair.

4. *I will not falter; God is always watching.* Colossians 1:15-17 illustrates Jesus' attentive interest in all He has created. Romans 8:34 pictures Him at the right hand of God interceding for us. When Jesus was on earth, each person who met Him received exactly what they needed under His compassionate attention. Christ's strength keeps us from faltering.

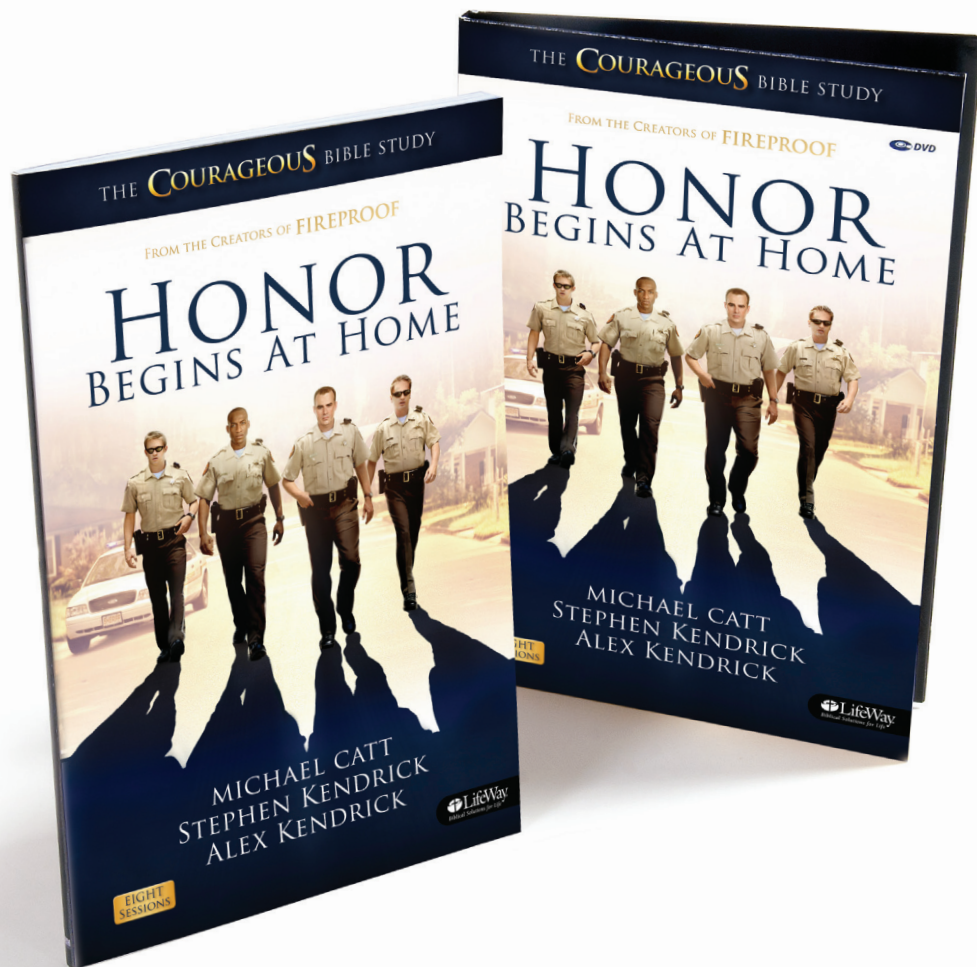
5. *I will not fail; God is always victorious.* Scripture repeatedly tells us Jesus Christ is always victorious. In John 16:33 He asserted, "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." Someday the clouds will break open, and He will return as King of kings and Lord of lords. Christ's present and future victory assures us we will not fail.

Underline the Scripture in points 1–5 above that speaks to your greatest need or concern at this time in your life.

Recite your memory verses for this week, 2 Peter 1:3-4, as a prayer.

Thank Jesus that through Him you have become a partaker of the divine nature and that every promise of God is yes in Him.

Christ's present and future victory assures us we will not fail.



IT'S EASY TO BE INSPIRED AT THE MOVIES. BRINGING IT HOME IS ANOTHER STORY.

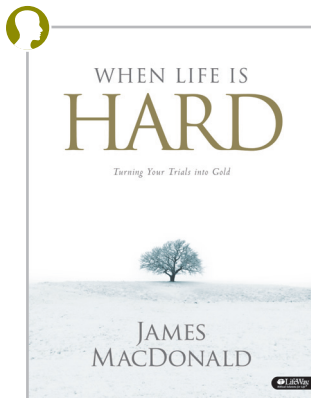
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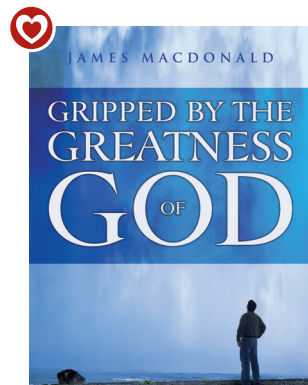


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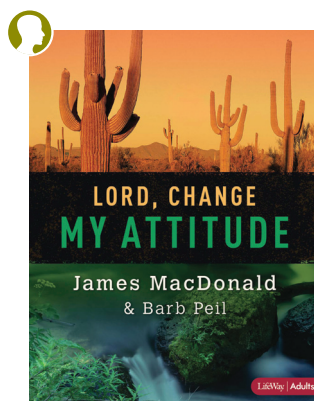


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ENTRUST YOUR LIFE TO THE ONE WHO ALWAYS KEEPS HIS PROMISES

God is a promiser by nature. The pages of Scripture are filled with great and precious promises that assure you of His loving presence and diligent work in your life. When life is hard, God's promises give you stability and hope to carry you through.

Always True reveals that God loves making promises to His children and always keeps His word. Author James MacDonald explores five key promises from Scripture and five ways believers can respond to them by faith:

1. I will not fear; God is always with me.
2. I will not doubt; God is always in control.
3. I will not despair; God is always good.
4. I will not falter; God is always watching.
5. I will not fail; God is always victorious.

No matter what trial you are going through in life, you can rely on God's promises to sustain you and to remind you that God is working in your hardship. Because the great Promise Keeper is trustworthy, you will find that His promises are always true.

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