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## Let's begin . . .

I'm sitting in my office now, listening to a song I used to sob through, and I am thinking about you.

I remember with stark vividness what it was like to have *nothing* but the promises of God. When I began to search the Scriptures for promises I did so with trembling hands and a desperate heart. I had to know what was going to happen in some incredibly dark days. I knew I could grope my way to the light if I just knew God had some hope for me that would carry me right through to the end. That's what the promises of God are all about, and I long for you to find them in a way that is quicker and easier than what I had to go through. Think for a moment . . . *God has made some promises . . .*

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's God—completely above and beyond us. As part of His creation, we are in no position to hold Him to anything; He owes us nothing. Before we get into our study, we must pause and get our minds around this inconceivable assertion: God flat out promises to do some things—for us. In fact, given certain circumstances, God has already told us what He will do! *That's amazing.* Second Peter 1:4 says, **“By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises”** (NKJV). God has recorded some assurances and He thinks they're **“exceedingly great and precious.”** I love that! Let's unpack that a bit . . .

## I Promise!

It's impossible to trick our kids anymore on April Fools' Day. After years of practical jokes and all kinds of fun chicanery that Kathy and I have poured out on them, they're now wise to it all. We even have to keep our eyes peeled for counterattacks!

One year we rushed into their bedrooms at six a.m. shouting, "Get up! We're late for school!" We had changed every clock in the house to read an hour later. Our yawning offspring ran downstairs, half-dressed. We stuffed them in the car and hurried across town—only to find the school parking lot empty. Kathy and I yelled, "April Fools!" and took them out for breakfast. The days of tricking our children on April 1st are over. They see it coming for weeks ahead of time.

However, one of the fallouts from teasing them is that when I wanted to be serious about something, they hesitated to believe me, wondering if we might be playing another joke. We had to make an unbreakable rule that if I said, "I promise," they could totally, completely trust me.

Though I could not perfectly fulfill the intent of those words in every instance they know to this day that when Dad says, "I promise," he is incredibly serious and will devote himself 100 percent to what he has said.

The problem of course is that we're human. We disappoint one another all the time—even the ones we love, even when we don't mean to. Our best intentions don't always happen.

And that's where we're so much different from God. When God says, "I promise," He delivers, because He can, and nothing will thwart or delay His intention to do exactly as He has promised. He doesn't forget or get distracted . . . He cannot lie and He cannot fail. God always follows through, on time, every time! When He makes a commitment, He keeps it. When He gives His word; it's a done deal.

### ***A promise and the Promiser***

A general definition of a promise is "a declaration of what someone will do." A promise usually implies a positive, dependable consequence. If there's a promise, we believe something good is going to happen. If something bad

is in the wind, we call it a threat. While God does make threats regarding the outcomes for bad behavior, those are not promises—they're a topic for a different kind of book.

What God understands and we must too, is that the character of the Promiser is on the line in every promise. Our church's longtime elder board chairman taught me that God honors the one **"who swears to his own hurt"** (Psalm 15:4). Whenever our backs were against the wall, and especially when our church was small and every decision was so critical, he insisted that our first action would always be to keep our word and do what we had promised even if the consequences were negative for us.

If we give our word, we've got to follow through. And the way the Lord values His relationship with us can't be appreciated until we realize how incredibly invested our God is in keeping His promises to us. How can we not be overwhelmed by the significance of Romans 8:32, **"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?"** Having given so much, God will surely never stop and refuse to complete in smaller things what He began to do for us in Christ.

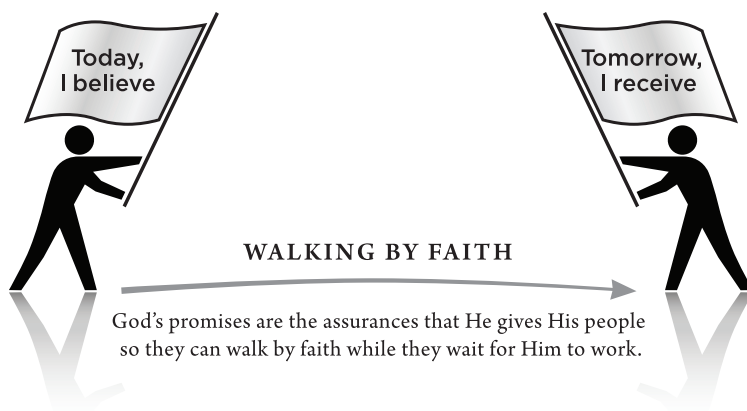
### ***Hang on to God's promises***

How we relate to God is largely determined by what we do with His promises. All that stands between you and what He has promised you is time. This book is about learning to live with today in the reality of what God has promised is our future. Even when it's hard to trust, God's promises remain the same. Nothing can change God's stated intent. Keep in mind that God even sympathizes with the challenge it is for us to lean on His promises: **"He knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust"** (Psalm 103:14). God has not left you wondering about what's going to happen, or uncertain about the future, or overcome by fear. He makes promises to you so you can get through the long nights and the difficult days of ***waiting***.

He asks you to hang on to His assurances of determined outcomes to get through the dark times when life is hard.

***In the meantime . . .***

The hardest moment of hanging on, of course, is the gap between believing His promise and receiving the fulfillment of that promise. The Christian life would be easy if the time was short between when you first *appeal to* God's promises and when you *receive* what He promised. If you could invoke God's pledge one day and cash it in the next, Wow—wouldn't that be great!? Forget about fast-food promises—that's not the way God works.



Today I believe; tomorrow (or at some point in the future) I receive. The distance between today and tomorrow is called walking by faith. The hard part is in the waiting between the promise and the answer; and even harder, when the waiting comes with more hardship or even setbacks.

*Where's this going? Where am I going to end up? What does my future look like? Things aren't getting better—they're getting worse!*

The reality is, we just don't know how things will play out and it's the "not knowing" that crushes us. We doubt because we don't know. We worry and despair because we can't see the outcome. We falter and sometimes fail—all because we can't stand not knowing. If only we could see for certain how this trial was going to end, we would be okay. But we don't—or we can't. So we agonize over the waiting.

I can take a bad day. I can put up with a hard month. I can even endure a lousy year or a horrendous decade if I have to, as long as I know how it will end up. But a few minutes of sheer unknowing can take me right to the

edge. You may be facing a health crisis today. Or you have a burden involving your marriage or an uncertainty with a child. For someone else, it's a restlessness in your soul. Questions fill your mind. *What's up ahead? What's gonna happen to me and those I love? How will I ever get through this? Am I gonna lose it? Will I be able to endure? Will we ever be okay again?*

### ***Our first response—waiting***

Here I stand today, gripping tightly with both hands God's promises while I wait for Him to work. I couldn't go forward another day if I didn't believe what He told me. I'm anchored to one thought: God says so. For now, that's going to have to be enough.

*God feels compassion for the pain of not knowing, and that is why He invented this idea of promise.*

Whether you realize it or not, we're in the same place. So here's what we must do: We must review His promises all the time. We must remind ourselves that our faith is in God who has never failed to do what He says. He knows what He has promised, He can't lie, and He can't forget. He will deliver on time, all the time. Who else makes promises like that? The promises are great, the outcomes are certain; all that remains is to wait on God's timing.

Again, today my faith is resting entirely on what God has said He will do.

God feels compassion for the pain of not knowing, and that is why He invented this idea of promise. It's as if He is saying, *I'm not going to leave you clueless. I'm not going to leave you wondering what I'm going to do. I don't want you to be overcome by fear. So I'm going to make you some promises to hold on to through the difficult days. You don't have to take your view of life from what you can see. You don't have to rest your happiness on what's happening right in front of you. You're not imprisoned by the crazy talk someone is putting into your head that you know isn't true. Hang on to the things I told you. What you saw clearly in the light hasn't changed just because the valley is dark. While we wait, God gives us His promises to hold on to.*

## ***God's promises are great***

Let's look at 2 Peter 1:4 again: **"By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises"** (NKJV). Why are they great?

### **1. God's promises are great because . . . they come from a great God.**

The promises are huge because of who said them. Would you believe your four-year-old if he said in his best grown-up voice, "I *promise* I'll make enough money to put food on the table next month"? A promise's veracity is tied to the one who is making the commitment—and to their ability to fulfill it.

Psalms 145:3 says, **"Great is the Lord . . . ; his greatness is unsearchable."** We might as well admit it: We don't have a clue how great God is because no one can discover the depth of His greatness. Only in His promises are we able to explore and experience just how great He really is.

I love Jeremiah 32:27: **"I am the Lord. . . . Is anything too hard for Me?"** Sometimes in life, we look at our need or the overwhelming circumstances and we feel beaten before we start. But God asks, *What exactly is it that you think I can't handle?* To which we would have to reply, *Nothing is too hard for You, Lord.* Does that give you courage and hope? It does me. Holding on to God's promises is the closest we get to actually holding on to God.

### **2. God's promises are great because . . . they address the great issues.**

Don't search the Bible for silly divine assertions about surface things. God doesn't do that. The promises He makes are about big things: fear, unknowns that would paralyze us regarding our future, our family, and our finances. If your god can't promise you anything bigger than an occasional good parking place or the last piece of pizza in the box, all I can tell you is that your god is way too small!

God's pledges respond to our deepest doubts: *Am I going to make it? What's going to happen up ahead? Where will those I love end up?* God makes promises about this kind of uncertainty so we won't have to wonder and worry.

God's promises are the antidote for despair. Despair is about as bad as it gets. Hope is lost: *I don't care. Nothing's going to change. It's always going to be like this. Nothing really matters anymore.* I'm sure somebody reading this is near the edge of despair. I've certainly been close to it myself in times past.

This is the time to learn from those who have navigated those dark choppy waters successfully.

David said, **“I would have despaired if I had not believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living”** (Psalm 27:13 NASB). *I’m not going to have to wait until heaven someday—I’m going to see God’s goodness right here on this earth with my own eyes.* David said, “I would have despaired if I didn’t believe that.” That’s the kind of stuff God’s promises are about.

God’s promises are great because they come from a great God and they’re about great issues.

### ***God’s promises are exceedingly great***

God’s promises are not just great; they’re *exceedingly* great—greater than anything else:

- *God’s promises are greater than human wisdom.* People will fill your ears with all sorts of blah-blah-blah. Proverbs 18:2 says, **“A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.”** But hear this: God has spoken and He’s made some promises that exceed by far the foolishness in what people often say when we are hurting.
- *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 just hang on? *I’m going to get through it. Just flip a couple of pages on the calendar and wait this one out.* Rather than make you endure your trial like an endless marathon, God’s promises offer strength and peace. Don’t just get through your trial, get on top of it with the promises of God.
- *God’s promises are greater than wallowing in self-pity.* Many people get hit by a wave of difficulty, followed by a tsunami that washes over them like a flood. Fine—have a day of that, but then rise to the surface, take hold of the promises of God, and ride the surf to shore. God will honor your faith. He’s not going to let you drown.

God’s exceedingly great and precious promises are your best possession:

- There’s nothing remotely like them.
- They will lead you through the darkest night.

- They will carry you through the longest day.
- They will accompany you through the deepest valley.

### ***God's promises are precious***

Scripture says that His promises are “**exceedingly great and precious**” (NKJV, emphasis added). “Precious” is not a kindergarten word. You’ll never hear a five-year-old use it. When you’re young, you don’t know what is valuable. You think *quick* or *cool* or *easy* is a high commodity. But the older you get, the more you realize that *precious* is best. *Precious* comes with a weight that conveys value.

The apostle Peter is infamous for his impulsive behavior. In the Gospels, he was fast, foolish, and fluctuating, more heat than light in those early days. When we meet him again thirty-five years later in 2 Peter, he has grown slower, softer, and quieter. His writing exudes time-worn wisdom. By then he knew what was precious. Just a couple of weeks after Peter wrote this final letter, he gave up his life for Jesus Christ. Church history records very reliably that Peter didn’t feel worthy to be killed in the same way that Jesus was. So his executioners granted him a last request and crucified him upside down.

Peter learned a lot about what is of greatest value in this world and in our faith. He wrote of the “precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:19) and described our faith as precious (1 Peter 1:7). He called believers precious stones (1 Peter 2:4). He referred to Jesus as a precious cornerstone (1 Peter 2:6) and tells us about God’s precious promises (2 Peter 1:4).

“Precious” is a treasure for those who aren’t in a hurry. It takes time and attentiveness to get to the place where you realize what is truly precious.

Precious also takes proving. Something isn’t precious to you until you’ve proven it so. I’ve got to admit that when I hear the word “precious,” I sometimes think of Gollum in the Lord of the Rings series who always croaked out, “My precious.” Even in that fantasy epic, that creepy little creature believed that the ring had power and could positively alter the course of his life. It follows that something is precious to you when you understand that it can do for you what nothing else can.

When Peter defined God’s promises as precious, he based his descrip-

tion on personal experience. He had found firsthand that hanging on to what God has said is the best way forward.

### ***Memorizing promises***

When Kathy and I were in college, we memorized a lot of Scripture, including a few wonderful biblical promises. I'm glad to have them committed to my mind, but honestly, they didn't become precious to me until years later when I had to put my full weight down on them. When God's promises hold you up and strengthen and sustain you, they become precious. They're treasured because of time. They're precious because they're proven. I have tasted and seen that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8). I don't just know it in my head; I've experienced it in my life. He's held me up. I've seen God's faithfulness. His promises do for us what nothing else can do. They untie knots that nothing else can unravel. They allow us to climb over life's obstacles with a *God says so* confidence.

So let's go after them.

If you and I have met in God's Word before, you know that my usual way to study the Scriptures is book-by-book, chapter-by-chapter, and verse-by-verse. But this is a topical study. In order to find the great and precious promises of God's Word—and believe me, there are awesome promises to be found—you've got to be ready to turn some Bible pages. These promises are like diamonds hidden in a mountain of gold. All of Scripture is gold, but in the midst of it are these precious gems, these promises.

I would challenge you to have your Bible open as you read. Find the verses we reference for yourself and underline them in your Bible. Our fingers are going to get a bit tired, but we won't care—we're mining the greatest treasure of the universe.

When we're done, you can also visit the Scripture index in the back of this book for a list of the Scriptures we've covered in each section. Spend the time to turn to them in your Bible and review them for the treasure that they are. Have them marked and ready for review in a time of emergency. And, right from the start, make these promises your own. As soon as you

realize one applies to a situation in your life, claim it, rest in it, and begin to wait attentively for God to keep His Word.

### **Three extra helps to make this study your own:**

#### ***Theology of a promise***

One of my favorite parts of this study is the section before each of the five promise chapters. There we will focus on one truth about how this whole promise thing works. “Theology of a Promise” will give a fresh definition to resting your life on the promises of God. What you believe about God is the most important thing about you. And so before we dig into each promise we will take a fresh look at the Promiser and why He has chosen to relate to us with promises.

My greatest desire for you is that as you read this book, your confidence and faith in the Lord God will grow stronger and deeper. I’m praying now that you’ll love Him more passionately as a result of what you discover about His character; you’ll trust Him more readily as your faith is stirred by His faithfulness to what He has promised; and you’ll desire Him more unashamedly as you begin to experience the power of standing on His promises.

This can all happen with your increased understanding and faith in God Himself. We are not just seeking the gifts of His hand, but our highest goal is to increasingly know, love, and trust the Giver, the God who wrote these promises down for us.

#### ***Take to heart***

At the end of every chapter you can take our definition of a promise, pull it out of the book, and put it to work in your life. I encourage you to engage with the questions. Ponder them for your own life. Can I ask you to share your thoughts with at least one person? This step can make all the difference in how this study of God’s Word will impact your life. Call a friend and discuss *Always True* together. Your conversations about what you are reading and how it applies to your life may be the most important thing that happens to you through this book.

God’s promises are an assurance God gives His people so they can walk by faith while they wait for Him to work.

### ***Know by heart***

Before we're done, I want you to know by heart all five of God's exceeding great and precious promises. You may already have some of these verses committed to memory. If you do, you know this investment pays huge dividends. Just take a verse at a time. Write it out on a 3 x 5 card or a sticky note and read it over, out loud, five or six times a day. Once you have it down, review it a couple of times a week and it's yours! I guarantee you won't be sorry if you take this challenge with an enthusiastic, "I'll do it!"

I believe everything that Scripture says about itself, and I want you to experience and share that confidence too. Scripture describes itself as milk (1 Peter 2:2), solid food (Hebrews 5:12–14), light (Psalm 119:105), and nourishment to your soul. By it you are warned of what could injure you and that in its study there is great reward (Psalm 19:11). Long after you forget the specifics of what you read in this book, my prayer is that you will still remember that *God's Word is real*. It's from God Himself. It's life changing. To neglect it is to starve, but to dig into it is to feed yourself and cause your soul to flourish. **"Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God"** (Romans 10:17 NKJV). The more you believe that God's Word holds life and truth, the more your faith in God will grow.

God's Word is always true—believe it.



### **A prayer for our journey into His promises**

*Thank You in advance, Lord, for what You will impress on our hearts about Yourself and Your promises in these pages. We commit ourselves afresh to believe Your Word and to listen for Your Spirit's prompting. Our lives cannot be the same once Your presence and Your promises are at home with us. Apart from You, we can do nothing.*

*Abide in us, Lord.*

*In the power of Jesus' Name, Amen.*