

# Moments *for* You

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Theme: Promises



## THE PROMISE OF HEAVEN

If you are a Christian, someone trusting Christ alone for your salvation, Scripture promises that the moment you leave this life you will go to Heaven. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. To depart this life is to “be with Christ” (Philippians 1:23). Indeed, “to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21).

Heaven is a perfect place for people made perfect. Perfection is the goal of God’s sanctifying work in us. He’s not merely making us better than we are; He is conforming us to the image of His Son. He is making us fit to dwell in His presence forever. It is the purpose for which He chose us before the foundation of the world.

God begins the process of perfecting us from the moment we are converted from unbelief to faith in Christ. The Holy Spirit regenerates us. He gives us a new heart with a new set of holy desires (Ezekiel 36:26). He transforms our stubborn wills. He opens our hearts to embrace the truth rather than reject it. He enables us to believe rather than doubt. He gives us a hunger for righteousness and a desire for Him. And thus the new birth transforms the inner person. From that point on, everything that occurs in our lives—good or bad—God uses to make us like Christ (Romans 8:28–30).

In terms of our moral and legal status, believers are judged perfect immediately—not on the basis of who we are or what we have done, but because of what Christ has done for us. We are fully justified the moment we believe. We are forgiven of all our sin. We are clothed with a perfect righteousness

(Isaiah 61:10; Romans 4:5), which instantly gives us a standing before God without any fear of condemnation (Romans 5:1; 8:1). This is the great position of privilege Scripture refers to when it says God has “blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:3). And when Paul writes that God has “raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6), he is again speaking of this position of favor with God that we have been granted by grace alone. We are not literally, physically seated with Christ in the heavenlies, of course. But legally, in the eternal court of God, we have been granted full rights to Heaven. But God does not stop there. Having judicially declared us righteous (Scripture calls that *justification*), God never stops conforming us to the image of His Son (that is *sanctification*).

If you are not a Christian, you need to lay hold of this truth by faith: *the sin that will keep you out of Heaven has no cure but the blood of Christ*. If you are weary of your sin and exhausted from the load of your guilt, He tenderly holds forth the offer of life and forgiveness and eternal rest to you: “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). No one will be turned away. Jesus said, “Whoever comes to Me I will never cast out” (John 6:37). All are invited: “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price” (Revelation 22:17).

—Condensed from *The Glory of Heaven* by John MacArthur

## SPIRIT OF PROMISE

*“In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, Who is the guarantee of our inheritance” (Ephesians 1:13-14).*

Paul, the human author of these words, is saying that when you listened to the gospel and believed, God assured you of His promise by giving you the promised Holy Spirit, who promises to you God’s inheritance.

I want you to notice three things in particular: the hearing, the believing, and the assurance.

### THE HEARING

It is a blessing of God to be able to *hear* the truth; not only to simply hear it proclaimed, but to be able to really hear it with understanding. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself, in the Parable of The Sower and The Soils, makes it clear that not everyone who comes in contact with the word of God really hears it and understands it and embraces it. In fact, in most of the soils there is a rejection of that word, but Paul is saying to these Ephesian Christians, ‘You heard the truth. When you heard the gospel proclaimed, you understood that it was true. You really listened to it.’ Let me stop and ask you today: have you heard with attentiveness the word of truth, the only gospel of salvation?

### THE BELIEVING

If we are to be saved, the gospel must not only be heard, it must be *believed*. There’s only one *saving* response to the gospel, and that is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as He is offered in that gospel as the only way of salvation, as the One who purchased for us the forgiveness of sins, who cleanses us, who gives us the blessings of being adopted into God’s

family and eternal life forevermore. Paul is saying to these Ephesians (and us), ‘You need to understand that God has sealed you with His Holy Spirit. He has marked you out as His own possession, and thereby He has assured you of receiving His inheritance, and He has assured you of His love for you.’

### THE ASSURANCE OF THE SPIRIT

From Old Testament times, as a way of assuring God’s people, He often gave them signs or marks whereby they would know of His love for them, and they could be reminded and brought back to obedience by living a life of faith and faithfulness. So, for instance, to the children of Israel He gave the signs of circumcision, and Passover, and the Sabbath Day—and to Christians He has given the signs of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. But isn’t it beautiful that the Apostle Paul here does not say that God has given us a “thing” or a “right” as the sign of His ownership, but He has given an awesome, divine, most powerful Person: the third Person of the Trinity. Salvation is by faith alone, and all those who trust in Christ alone are marked out as God’s, and are assured by the Holy Spirit.

Paul calls the Spirit the *promised* Spirit, or the Spirit of the promise. Now this means a lot of things, but one thing it means is that this Holy Spirit being given was prophesied of by the prophets in the Old Testament. “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh” (Joel 2:28). This was fulfilled at Pentecost (see Acts 2:14-21).

He also says that we were sealed. The Holy Spirit is the seal; He is God’s mark of ownership. You know that a brand is often put on an animal to indicate who owns it, and very often stamps or seals are affixed to official documents to indicate our ownership

of them. Knowing that we are owned by God produces assurance; and, so, the very purpose of being sealed with the Holy Spirit is that we might be assured that God's promises to us will come to pass.

Paul also says the Spirit is given as a pledge of our inheritance. The Spirit is a pledge, or a down payment, guaranteeing us that we will receive God's inheritance, and guaranteeing us that we are God's inheritance. Just as an engagement ring is a pledge of marriage, just as a deposit on a house is a partial payment indicating that the fullness of the amount will be paid to the owner or to the bank eventually, so also the Spirit is given to us as a deposit, as a down payment, by God, indicating to us that He will give us the fullness of His blessing.

My friends, to realize that we belong to God, that we are God's special possession, changes the way that we approach life. We've been chosen as God's unique treasure in Jesus Christ. We've been called to live for His glory. This is a life re-orienting truth. He has provided for us richly beyond all that we could ask or think.

—Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III, condensed

## PROMISES PROMOTE PURITY

*“Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).*

Paul urges us to cleanse ourselves. The matter of growing in holiness, of cleansing the dirtiness and defilement in our conduct and in our hearts, of moving closer to purity, is not something we can just pray about and leave to God. There is a work to be done here that only we can do. God expects

and requires us to take the initiative. Many a battle for purity has been lost because I failed to act decisively, waiting for Someone else to do something. If I fail to cleanse myself, no one else will step in to do it for me.

Paul names the scope of my concern as *all* personal defilement. I am not just targeting the big and obvious reprehensible sins, the ones that other people might gasp at if they knew. But I am aiming at every kind of sin and behavior that will defile my purity, even the little, hidden ones about which some may ask, “Why are you worried about that little thing?” The shirt is not clean if one small spot remains.

Paul focuses on defilement of the flesh *and* of the spirit. It's not just about what you do, but it's about what you think and what you want. God cares about what is hidden and invisible in my heart, not just what I do with my body. Jesus makes it clear that, contrary to our common conclusions, the source of our defilement is what comes out in our lives from our desires and thoughts. Keeping myself from engaging in visible and obvious sins does not make me “good”—purity is far more than that.

All our obedience is built on faith in God's promises. God has taken the initiative. Seeing our weakness and helplessness, God moves near and commits to help us. God does not give us commands to obey without offering to us power to obey and incentives to obey Him. With God's promises in hand, believing obedience to God becomes an entirely different thing.

In 2 Corinthians 6:16-18 Paul refers to some *very specific* promises of God, quoted from the Old Testament. Promises of what God will *be*—their God and a Father to them (relationship, not alienation or isolation). Promises of what God will *do*—He will

dwell in them and walk among them (God is near, not far away). Promises of what God will do for us, *if we will only separate ourselves from sin*—He will welcome us, be a Father to us, make us His sons and daughters (identity, security, significance and purpose). God promises I am not alone and I am not on my own. Though the fight against impurity is harder than anyone will ever know, I have these promises from God. Based on these very promises, I tackle the challenge of purity daily.

—Bart Bryant

## GOD'S PROMISE, THROUGH GOD'S POWER

When Abraham and Sarah believed the promise that God would give them a son, they didn't get pregnant immediately. In fact, there was a 25-year gap between when God made the promise they'd have a son and when Sarah got pregnant. Now, 25 years is a long time to wait for a son when you are newlywed; when you're in your 90s, it probably feels like an eternity.

Around year 15, Sarah decides it's time to help God out. So, she brings her household servant, Hagar, to Abraham and says, 'Look, it's clearly not happening with me, so maybe you should have a baby with her.'

What is Sarah doing? She hasn't stopped believing the promise that God would give them a son. She just thinks it is on her to make it happen. She is attempting to fulfill the promise of God through a scheme of the flesh.

Abraham apparently had more issues than a lack of faith, because he just goes along with it. And shortly thereafter, Sarah's "plan" works: Hagar gets pregnant by Abraham and calls their son "Ishmael." Ishmael will himself grow up to father a great na-

tion—but not the nation of promise.

This, the Apostle Paul says in Galatians chapters 4 and 5, is exactly what Christians do when they turn to the law to bring them closer to God. They are attempting to fulfill the promise of God through a scheme of the flesh. Like Sarah, they haven't totally stopped believing God's promise of salvation; they just think it is on them to accomplish it.

Like Sarah, and like the Galatians of Paul's day, we too often want to fast-track God's promise. But salvation belongs to God alone, and it is a gift you can only receive by faith. God doesn't need any potential *from* you to work miracles in you.

This reminds me of one of my favorite promises about the Holy Spirit. In Luke 7:28, Jesus points out to the disciples that the greatest preacher who ever lived was John the Baptist. And then He says, "The one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

"Least in the kingdom" means you have the least potential, you are the least impressive, and you have the fewest spiritual gifts. Statistically speaking, *someone* has to be the least. Maybe you're thinking, 'That sounds right. I think he may be talking about me.' But you need to understand this: Even if you are literally the least in the kingdom, *you have more potential in ministry than John the Baptist ever had*, because you have something he never had: the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is no longer about the *ability* you bring to ministry but your *availability* to Christ.

You may come from the most jacked-up background, or your resume may be a litany of failures, but God can still bring about His promise through you. It doesn't matter if you are barren, because Christ supplies *everything*.

With Christ, we can wait with confident hope, knowing that the same God who worked miracles for Abraham and Sarah is eager to work miracles in and through us. If God can make something of Abraham, who the Bible says was “as good as dead,” then He can make something of you. God isn’t done with any of us.

—J. D. Greear, condensed

## STOLEN PROMISES

Christians have the bad habit of isolating Bible verses from their appropriate context, and then claiming the verse as a promise God has given to them personally. In many cases, the promise gives tremendous comfort to us in the moment, but it’s been taken out of context so it’s a misuse of the Bible and the promise.

Jeremiah 29:11 is probably one of the most abused passages used to give comfort to a Christian in a difficult situation. If taken at face value, the verse is richly encouraging: “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.”

The difficulty with this particular passage, and many others that Christians claim, is that it is addressed to a specific group of people. This passage, when read in the larger context, is actually part of a letter written to a particular group of people. Indeed, at the top of the chapter we read these words: “These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon” (Jeremiah 29:1).

My point is that regardless of how much better you feel from this verse, it is *not your promise* because God is

talking about the exiles in Babylon. He is not talking about you personally reading it 2700 years later.

Is there something we can and should learn from this passage? Absolutely. The lesson for us comes from seeing how God dealt with Israel and learning what that says about God. Now, are there promises in the New Testament, specifically, that are clearly given to Christians in time of difficulty?

- Matthew 28:20, Jesus promised “I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

- Matthew 6:26, He said, “Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they.” The Father will take care of you. That’s encouraging.

- 1 Peter 5:5-7 is a passage that I have reflected on a lot of late: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you.”

- Philippians 4:6-7, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

- Hebrews 4:15 and 2:18 describe Jesus, who “in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” so “He is able to help those who are being tempted.”

- Hebrews 12:11, “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

These are all passages that we can

lay hold of and claim when we're in a position of difficulty. But, of course, there's a problem. Frequently, the person looking for a promise in the Bible does not want those verses that talk about going through difficulties. They want the verse that says, "I know the plans I have for you ... plans for welfare and not for evil." They want the promise that says God's going to get me out of this trouble and make things nice and good.

The problem is that there is no such universal promise. There is no such promise for the Christian in the New Testament. Yes, we have a future and a hope, but hard times aren't strange. They're normal. We can trust God because He is working on behalf of His people for His purposes. The circumstances aren't always easy, but He will strengthen us through the hard times and comfort us.

So don't steal somebody else's promise. Come to terms with the truth in the New Testament that, for the Christian, life on earth will bring various trials and turmoil that God has never promised to spare us from. He has promised His presence and His power in the midst of those difficulties to transform us into the image of Christ. And that's a promise worth claiming. —Greg Koukl, condensed

## PLANS AND PROMISES

*"Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand" (Proverbs 19:21).*

A lot of life's letdowns have a greater purpose. That five-minute delay looking for your misplaced car key? Maybe the Lord kept you out of a deadly accident on your commute. That part-time job you didn't get when you were in college? Maybe the Lord steered you away from a wrong career path. That date who stood you up

and made you feel so small all those years ago? Maybe it was God's way of keeping you available for the person He had in mind for you to meet and later marry. Trust in God's wisdom, goodness, and sovereignty.

*"And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).*

Maybe you find yourself in circumstances where your potential is hampered by limitations beyond your control. Look again. What open doors might you be overlooking right in front of your nose? God may be using the closed doors to accomplish certain results in your life—or to equip you for something much larger. Maybe He's teaching you to trust Him completely, to wait on Him patiently, and to surrender to Him and His timing entirely.

*"You make known to me the path of life; in Your presence there is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11).*

I'm convinced that you and I spend too much of our lives staring at closed doors. We're dejected, disappointed, maybe even offended that God wouldn't let us through. We make our plans, plot our courses, and push off with enthusiasm—only to be waylaid by some insurmountable obstacle that sends us back to square one. The truth is, sometimes God closes doors to the logical, easy path to open us up to opportunities we've viewed as insurmountable.

*"The Lord is my strength and my shield; in Him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to Him" (Psalm 28:7).*

I find great comfort in knowing God is God and I am not. The longer I've lived, the less put off I am when God slams doors shut and moves me in another direction. Yes, early on in life

and ministry it irritated me. I'd sometimes pout, maybe even grumble. But I finally discovered He always opens new doors of opportunity I could never have imagined. I'm not at all offended when a good, all-wise, sovereign God steers me in a better direction. In fact, I'm grateful. And you should be too.

*“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).*

Stop pounding on closed doors. Stop trying to pry them open. Leave them with God. Know that God takes full responsibility for the doors He closes to you and those He opens. He can—and will—deal with what's behind them in His own way. You don't need to worry about them. The door God closes to you may be opened for somebody else. That's His business. Move along, knowing that the Lord

will guide you where He needs you.

*“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit” (Jeremiah 17:7-8).*

When God closes a door, it doesn't necessarily mean your plan was bad. It may very well be that He's steering you away from something that would have been good, but where He leads you instead is much better. So, when God closes the door on something you know would be good, brace yourself. He may have something even greater in mind. Trust in Him with firm hope and confidence, and in due season His plans for you will bear fruit.

—Chuck Swindoll, from *Never Lose Hope*

## OUR THOUGHTS AND GOD'S PROMISES

### Our Thinking • God's Promise

*It's impossible* • All things are possible (Luke 18:27)

*I'm too tired* • I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28-30)

*Nobody really loves me* • I love you (John 3:16; John 13:34)

*I can't go on* • My grace is sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9)

*I can't figure things out* • I will direct your steps (Proverbs 3:5-6)

*I can't do it* • You can do all things in Me (Philippians 4:13)

*I'm not able to* • I am able (2 Corinthians 9:8)

*It's not worth it* • It will be worth it (Romans 8:28)

*I can't forgive myself* • I forgive you (1 John 1:9)

*I can't manage* • I will supply all your needs (Philippians 4:19)

*I'm afraid* • I haven't given you a spirit of fear (2 Timothy 1:7)

*I'm always worried & frustrated* • Cast all your anxiety on Me (1 Peter 5:7)

*I don't have enough faith* • I've given everyone a measure of faith (Rom. 12:3)

*I'm not smart enough* • I give you wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:30)

*I feel all alone* • I will never leave you or forsake you (Heb. 13:5)

—From *Bible Promises Made Easy*