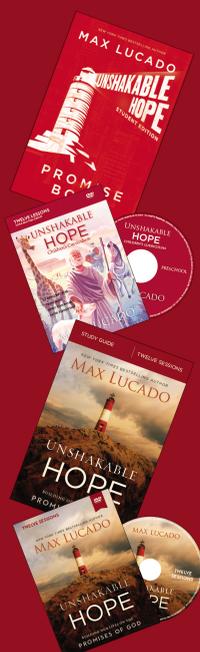


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MAX LUCADO



UNSHAKABLE
HOPE

BUILDING OUR LIVES ON THE
PROMISES OF GOD

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“I firmly believe God has anointed my dear friend Max Lucado with a gift to communicate His heart to this generation. In his fortieth book, he shares how God’s promises give us a firm foundation on which we can build our lives. The truth is, once you believe the promises of God, you not only have hope, your life is forever changed!”

—ROBERT MORRIS, FOUNDING SENIOR PASTOR, GATEWAY CHURCH; BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE BLESSED LIFE*, *THE GOD I NEVER KNEW*, AND *FREQUENCY*

“Where do we find our hope and strength when the realities of life devastate and depress us? I love how Max points us to Jesus, our eternal source of help, while highlighting crucial biblical truths and promises we all need to cling to in the midst of our own hard things.”

—LYSA TERKEURST, *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *UNINVITED*; PRESIDENT, PROVERBS 31 MINISTRIES

“Hope is an increasingly scarce commodity these days. That’s why I’m so grateful for Max Lucado’s voice and for *Unshakable Hope*. For some people, this book will be a deeply needed reminder of what we already know about God, life, and the future but usually forget. For many others, it will be an introduction on how to finally beat cynicism and discouragement, something the world desperately needs.”

—CAREY NIEUWHOF, FOUNDING PASTOR, CONNEXUS CHURCH

“Life doesn’t turn out like we expect it to and hope is often in short supply. It’s then that we have to decide what we will place our hope in. With pastoral care and the heart of a friend, Max points us back to the only lasting source of hope, the promises of God. This is a must-read for anyone struggling with purpose, wrestling with despair, or losing trust.”

—MARK BATTERSON, *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE CIRCLE MAKER*; LEAD PASTOR, NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

“God is able and willing to do mighty things through His people who believe Him. When we are at our weakest, God’s unchanging promises to live in and through us are our lifeline. Max Lucado is a hero of the faith and a reliable guide to take us on this journey!”

—JENNIE ALLEN, AUTHOR OF *NOTHING TO PROVE*; FOUNDER AND VISIONARY, IF:GATHERING

“A conversation with a supervisor. The decision of a spouse or a child. An earthquake or a car accident. Almost every day, an unexpected event or unforeseen circumstance arises to remind us how shaky the world is. With the recent and tragic rise of suicide rates, it’s clear that more than ever, people are desperate for an unshakable place to build their lives. I thank God for working through Pastor Max Lucado to give us this precious resource, brimming with Scripture-saturated hope, and leading us to the only unshakable foundation for life—the unfailing promises of God. *Unshakable Hope* will draw you closer to the God who promises to richly provide for all your needs, and will give you Scripture-based anchor points to hold you through life’s storms. I hope you’ll keep a copy close at hand in every season of life.”

—LOUIE GIGLIO, PASTOR, PASSION CITY CHURCH; FOUNDER,
PASSION CONFERENCES; AUTHOR OF *GOLIATH MUST FALL*

“Bangor, Maine, is a small town with only a few flights in and out per day yet it boasts an enormous international airport with a two-mile-long runway that can accommodate the largest planes in the world. The reason is strategic, Bangor is the first piece of American soil Atlantic flights hit after twenty-five hundred miles of water. If they are in distress they don’t have to ditch in the ocean if they can just make it to Bangor. The book you hold in your hands offers for your soul what Bangor does for airplanes running on fumes: a safe place to land. Max Lucado does in his fortieth book what has earned him a place of trust in our hearts through the other thirty-nine—he points the way to the miles-long runway of God’s unshakable hope that can handle the weight of your hurt.”

—LEVI LUSKO, AUTHOR OF *I DECLARE WAR: 4 KEYS
TO WINNING THE WAR WITH YOURSELF*

“In a world where despair and anxiety are at epidemic levels, Max reminds us that our sure and certain hope is found in the unchanging promises of God.”

—SHEILA WALSH, AUTHOR OF *IT’S OKAY NOT TO BE OKAY*

UNSHAKABLE
HOPE

ALSO BY MAX LUCADO

INSPIRATIONAL

3:16
A Gentle Thunder
A Love Worth Giving
And the Angels Were Silent
Anxious for Nothing
Because of Bethlehem
Before Amen
Come Thirsty
Cure for the Common Life
Facing Your Giants
Fearless
Glory Days
God Came Near
Grace
Great Day Every Day
He Chose the Nails
He Still Moves Stones
In the Eye of the Storm
In the Grip of Grace
It's Not About Me
Just Like Jesus
Max on Life
More to Your Story
Next Door Savior
No Wonder They Call Him the Savior
On the Anvil
Outlive Your Life
Six Hours One Friday
The Applause of Heaven
The Great House of God
Traveling Light
When Christ Comes

When God Whispers Your Name
You'll Get Through This

FICTION

Christmas Stories
The Christmas Candle
Miracle at the Higher Grounds Café

BIBLES (GENERAL EDITOR)

Grace for the Moment Daily Bible
The Lucado Life Lessons Study Bible
Children's Daily Devotional Bible

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

A Max Lucado Children's Treasury
Do You Know I Love You, God?
God Forgives Me, and I Forgive You
God Listens When I Pray
Grace for the Moment: 365 Devotions for Kids
Hermie, a Common Caterpillar
Itsy Bitsy Christmas
I'm Not a Scaredy Cat
Just in Case You Ever Wonder
Lucado Treasury of Bedtime Prayers
One Hand, Two Hands
Thank You, God,

for Blessing Me
Thank You, God, for Loving Me
The Boy and the Ocean
The Crippled Lamb
The Oak Inside the Acorn
The Tallest of Smalls
You Are Mine
You Are Special

YOUNG ADULT BOOKS

3:16
It's Not About Me
Make Every Day Count
Wild Grace
You Were Made to Make a Difference

GIFT BOOKS

Fear Not Promise Book
For the Tough Times
God Thinks You're Wonderful
Grace for the Moment
Grace Happens Here
His Name Is Jesus
Let the Journey Begin
Live Loved
Mocha with Max
Safe in the Shepherd's Arms
This Is Love
You Changed My Life

UNSHAKABLE
HOPE

BUILDING OUR LIVES ON THE
PROMISES OF GOD

MAX LUCADO



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

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For Mikal and Tammy Watts.
Your love and generosity remind us of Jesus.
We thank God for your unshakable faith and friendship.

He plunged into the promise and came up strong.

—Romans 4:20 THE MESSAGE

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Acknowledgments

Forty.

Noah floated for 40 days in the flood.

Moses spent 40 years in the desert.

The Hebrews wandered 40 years in the wilderness.

Jesus endured 40 days of temptation.

There's something significant about the number 40.

So, if you'll allow me to mention the fact, this is my fortieth book. No one could be more grateful than I am. To think that God would let a converted drunk prone to self-promotion and self-centeredness, write one page, much less forty books' worth, is yet another testimony to his goodness and grace.

Thank you, Father.

And thank you to this invaluable team of colleagues and friends.

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- Steve and Cheryl Green—in some language your names mean “faithful and true.” For indeed you are.

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- Our splendid family—Brett, Jenna, Rosie and Max; Andrea; Jeff and Sara. No dad or grandpa could be prouder.
- And Denalyn, my dear wife.

*Had I the pen of a poet,
had I the stars to give you,
even then I couldn't show it,
I couldn't show the love I have for you.*

CHAPTER 1

God's Great and
Precious Promises

GOD'S PROMISE

[God] has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature.

—2 Peter 1:4

The contrast between the rabbi and the king was stark. The Jew was old and bent. He had no bodily advantage. Two years in prison had left him gaunt, his cheeks hollow and smudged. His purse had but a few coins and his entourage but a couple of friends. Baldness laureled his head. His beard was full yet gray. He wore the simple cloak of a teacher, a traveling teacher. Compared to the king, he was simple, impoverished. Of course, compared to this king, most people were simple and impoverished. King Agrippa entered the court that day with great pomp. He and his sister were arrayed in purple. Roman legionnaires followed. Agrippa was the appointed ruler, the curator of religion, and the overseer of the area.

Paul, by contrast, was a simple missionary. He had every reason to fear the judgment of this monarch. The king was the latest in the Herod dynasty, the last of the Herods who would meddle with Christ or his followers. His great-grandfather attempted to kill baby Jesus by slaughtering the children of Bethlehem. His granduncle murdered John the Baptist, and his father, Agrippa I, executed James and imprisoned Peter.

You might say they had it out for the people in Jesus' circle.

And now Paul stood before him. He was in prison, and in trouble, for preaching a new religion. How would the apostle defend himself? Appeal for mercy? Call for a miracle? In what was arguably the most important speech of his life, how would Paul present his case? After a word of introduction, he said, "And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today" (Acts 26:6).

Paul's defense included no reference to his accomplishments.

(“I have been known to call a person back from the dead, you know.”) He demanded no preferential treatment. (“I am a Roman citizen.”) He didn’t attempt to justify his actions. (“I was only being open-minded.”) None of that. His only justification was this: “I believed in the promises of God.”

So did Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Add to that list Noah, Mary, a prophet named Isaiah, and a preacher named Peter.

The heroes in the Bible came from all walks of life: rulers, servants, teachers, doctors. They were male, female, single, and married. Yet one common denominator united them: they built their lives on the promises of God. Because of God’s promises, Noah believed in rain before *rain* was a word. Because of God’s promises, Abraham left a good home for one he’d never seen. Because of God’s promises, Joshua led two million people into enemy territory. Because of God’s promises, David conked a giant, Peter rose from the ashes of regret, and Paul found a grace worth dying for.

One writer went so far as to call such saints “heirs of the promise” (Heb. 6:17 NASB). It is as if the promise was the family fortune, and they were smart enough to attend the reading of the will.

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. . . .

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. . . . He lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. . . . And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. . . .

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son. (Heb. 11:7–17)

The list goes on for several verses. Jacob trusted God's promises. Joseph trusted God's promises. Moses trusted God's promises. Their stories were different, but the theme was the same: God's promises were polestars in their pilgrimages of faith. They had plenty of promises from which to pick.

One student of Scripture spent a year and a half attempting to tally the number of promises God has made to humanity. He came up with 7,487 promises!¹ God's promises are pine trees in the Rocky Mountains of Scripture: abundant, unbending, and perennial. Some of the promises are positive, the assurance of blessings. Some are negative, the guarantee of consequences. But all are binding, for not only is God a promise maker; God is a promise keeper.

As God was preparing the Israelites to face a new land, he made a promise to them.

Then the LORD said: "I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the LORD, will do for you." (Ex. 34:10)

God did not emphasize the Israelites' strength. He emphasized his. He did not underscore their ability. He highlighted his. He equipped them for the journey by headlining his capacity to make and keep his promises.

From the first chapter of Scripture, the Bible makes a case for the dependability of God. Nine times the text reiterates "God said." And without exception when God spoke, something happened. Something wonderful happened. By divine fiat there was light, land, beaches, and creatures. God consulted no advisers. He needed no assistance. He spoke, and it happened. The reader is left with one conclusion: God's word is sure. What he says happens.

UNSHAKABLE HOPE

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
 their starry host by the breath of his mouth.
He gathers the waters of the sea into jars;
 he puts the deep into storehouses.
Let all the earth fear the LORD;
 let all the people of the world revere him.
For he spoke, and it came to be;
 he commanded, and it stood firm. (Ps. 33:6–9)

When God cleared his throat, the cosmos appeared. His authority was certain.

The same power is seen in Jesus Christ. On one occasion an officer in the Roman military asked Jesus to heal his servant. Jesus offered to go to the man's home. The officer refused, saying,

“Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”

When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, “Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. . . .”

Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would.” And his servant was healed at that moment. (Matt. 8:8–10, 13)

Why did Jesus applaud the faith of the centurion? Because the man believed in the power of Jesus to keep his word. In fact, this story gives us Jesus' definition of faith: *faith is the deeply held belief that God will keep his promises*. The Roman soldier understood this simple truth: God will

not—indeed he cannot—break his promises. His covenants are contractually inviolable, written not in sand but carved in granite. What he says will happen.

It must happen! His promises are irrevocable because of who God is:

- He is unchanging. He sees the end from the beginning. He's never caught off guard by the unexpected. He makes no mid-course corrections. He is not victimized by moods or weather. "He never changes or casts a shifting shadow" (James 1:17 NLT).
- He is faithful. "God can be trusted to keep his promise" (Heb. 10:23 NLT).
- He is strong. He does not overpromise and underdeliver. "God is able to do whatever he promises" (Rom. 4:21 NLT).
- He cannot lie. "It is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18 NLT). A rock cannot swim. A hippo cannot fly. A butterfly cannot eat a bowl of spaghetti. You cannot sleep on a cloud, and God cannot lie. He never exaggerates, manipulates, fibs, or flatters. This verse does not say it is unlikely that God will lie or improbable that God will lie. No, the statement is clear: it is impossible! Scripture could not be more forthright. "God . . . cannot lie" (Titus 1:2 ASV). Deceit is simply not an option. "He doesn't break promises!" (Titus 1:2 THE MESSAGE).

This theme of God as a promise keeper stirs a childhood memory. When I was around twelve years old, I tagged along with my father as he went to buy new tires for the family car. Dad was from a small town and simpler times. He was unadorned of fancy dress or wealth. He was a reliable oil field mechanic who loved his family, paid his bills, and kept his word. He was insulted by those who doubted his integrity. He was certainly insulted that day in the tire shop.

He selected the tires, and we waited as they were being mounted. When it came time to pay the bill, I stood by Dad's side at the counter as he wrote the check. The salesclerk looked at the check and then requested that my father produce some identification. Such a practice is common and unquestioned today, but in the 1960s a merchant seldom asked for verification.

Dad was taken aback.

"You don't believe I am who that check says I am?"

The clerk was embarrassed. "We require this of all customers."

"Do you think I am dishonest?"

"It's not that, sir."

"If you don't think I am good for my word, you can remove those tires."

I remember a long moment of awkward silence as the clerk weighed his options.

We went home with the tires. And I went home with a lesson on integrity. Good people are serious about keeping their word. How much more serious would a good God be? What was said about God's faithfulness to Israel can be said about his faithfulness to us. "Not one of all the LORD's good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled" (Josh. 21:45).

The question is not, will God keep his promises, but, will we build our lives upon them?

I have many quirks, not the least of which is a shaky left thumb. For the last decade or so, it has quivered. It's as if my thumb lives on a caffeine drip. Were I to secure a glass of soda left-handed, I would slosh it everywhere. But I'm not left-handed, so the quiver doesn't bother me. I actually use it as a conversation starter. ("Hey, can I show you my shaky thumb? Now you show me your oddities.")

I've grown accustomed to the localized tremor. At first, however, I wasn't so calm. The shaking shook me. I thought something had come

unwired. Because my father passed away from ALS, my imagination assumed the worse. The situation was especially unnerving because my left thumb follows me everywhere I go. When I comb my hair, there's Old Wobbly. When I putt, guess who can't settle down? If I raise my left hand to make a point in a sermon, you might not trust what I say because of the knockety knuckle.

I set up an appointment with the neurologist and entered his office with a dry mouth and dread. He reviewed my blood work and examined me. He had me walk, balance, and spin a few plates on my finger. (Just kidding. He didn't make me walk.) He tapped my knee with a rubber hammer and asked me some questions. Then after an interminably long time, he said, "No need to worry."

"You sure?"

"I'm sure."

"No treatment?"

"Nope."

"No wheelchair?"

"Nope, not from what I can see."

"You sure?"

He then did something profound. "I promise," he assured me. "The tremor in your thumb is nothing to worry about."

So I hopped down and thanked him and walked out. I felt better. I climbed in the car and began the drive home. While stopped at a traffic light, I noticed my left hand on the steering wheel. Can you guess what my thumb was doing? Yep. It was shaking.

For the first time since the tremor had appeared, I had the opportunity to look at it differently. I could ponder the problem, or I could remember the promise. I could choose anxiety, or I could choose hope. I opted for hope. As corny as this might sound, I can remember saying to my thumb, "You're not getting any more of my attention. The doctor made me a promise. You are harmless." From that moment on, each

time the thumb has misbehaved, I've thought of the promise from the doctor.

What is shaking in your world? Not likely your thumb, but possibly your future, your faith, your family, or your finances. It's a shaky world out there.

Could you use some unshakable hope?

If so, you are not alone. We live in a day of despair. The suicide rate in America has increased 24 percent since 1999.² Twenty-four percent! If a disease saw such a spike, we would deem it an epidemic. How do we explain the increase? We've never been more educated. We have tools of technology our parents could not have dreamed of. We are saturated with entertainment and recreation. Yet more people than ever are orchestrating their own deaths. How could this be?

Among the answers must be this: people are dying for lack of hope. Secularism sucks the hope out of society. It reduces the world to a few decades between birth and hearse. Many people believe this world is as good as it gets, and let's face it. It's not that good.

But People of the Promise have an advantage. They determine to ponder, proclaim, and pray the promises of God. They are like Abraham who "didn't tiptoe around God's promise asking cautiously skeptical questions. He plunged into the promise and came up strong" (Rom. 4:20 THE MESSAGE).

They filter life through the promises of God. When problems surface, they can be heard telling themselves, "But God said . . ." When struggles threaten, they can be seen flipping through Scripture, saying, "I think God said something about this." When comforting others, they're prone to ask, "Do you know God's promise on this topic?"

The promises of God serve as an apothecary shelf of remedies. Just as the doctor might prescribe a medication for your body, God has given promises for your heart. He shares them as gifts from friend to

friend. "Friendship with God is reserved for those who reverence him. With them alone he shares the secrets of his promises" (Ps. 25:14 TLB).

For every problem in life God has given us a promise. Make it your aim to get so acquainted with these promises that you can write yourself a prescription.

- I'm feeling fearful today. Time for me to open up a bottle of Judges 6:12: "The LORD is with you." I will lay claim to the nearness of God.
- The world feels out of control. Time for a dose of Romans 8:28: "All things work together for good" (NKJV).
- I see dark clouds on the horizon. What was it Jesus told me? Oh, now I remember: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

After forty (!) years of ministry I've discovered that nothing lifts the weary soul like the promises of God. This book contains some of my favorites. Many of them are go-to promises I've turned to throughout the years to encourage others. And to encourage myself. We desperately need them. We do not need more opinions or hunches; we need the definitive declarations of our mighty and loving God. He governs the world according to these great and precious promises.

The circumstances of life or the promises of God—upon which are you standing?

Jesus told a story about two home builders. They had similar supplies and plans and identical aspirations. Each wanted to build a house. But one preferred the cheap and easily accessed land of sand. The other opted for the more expensive yet more durable foundation of stone.

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

UNSHAKABLE HOPE

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. (Matt. 7:24–27)

What separates the wise from the foolish? Both men hear God's words. But only the wise man builds his house upon them.

How is your foundation holding up? I wonder if a modern-day version of the parable might read like this:

Two people set out to build their houses. The first went to RPF Home Supply: Regrets, Pain, and Fear. He ordered lumber that was rotted by guilt, nails that were rusty from pain, and cement that was watered down with anxiety. Since his home was constructed with RPF supplies, every day was consumed with regret, pain, and fear.

The second builder chose a different supplier. She secured her supplies from Hope Incorporated. Rather than choose regret, pain, and fear, she found ample promises of grace, protection, and security. She made the deliberate, conscious decision to build a life from the storehouse of hope.

Which of the two builders was wiser? Which of the two was happier? Which of the two is most like you?

By the way, I'm standing on a promise as I share these words.

As the rain and snow come down from heaven and stay upon the ground to water the earth, and cause the grain to grow and to produce seed for the farmer and bread for the hungry, so also is my word. I

GOD'S GREAT AND PRECIOUS PROMISES

send it out, and it always produces fruit. It shall accomplish all I want it to and prosper everywhere I send it. (Isa. 55:10–11 TLB)

Note the certainty of God's promise. God's word "always produces fruit. It shall accomplish all I want it to and prosper everywhere I send it."

Picture God's words falling like rain from heaven on you. Imagine these promises as gentle spring showers. Receive them. Allow them to land on you, to soak you. I'm trusting that God's words will prosper in your life. Will you join me in believing this promise?

According to Peter, God's promises aren't just great; they are "very great." They aren't just valuable; they are "precious" (2 Peter 1:4). To bind them around your neck is to adorn yourself with the finest jewels of the universe. It is through the *great and precious promises* that we participate in the divine nature of God. They lead us into a new reality, a holy environment. They are direction signs intended to guide us away from the toxic swampland and into the clean air of heaven. They sit like golden stones in the pathway to God's world. They are strong boulders that form the bridge over which we walk from our sin to salvation. Promises are the stitching in the spine of the Bible.

The American evangelist Dwight Moody said it this way:

Let a man feed for a month on the promises of God, and he will not talk about his poverty. . . . If you would only go from Genesis to Revelation and see all the promises made by God to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to the Jews and the Gentiles, and to all His people everywhere; if you would spend a month feeding on the precious promises of God, you would not go about . . . complaining about how poor you are, but you would lift up your heads with confidence and proclaim the riches of His Grace, because you could not help it.³

UNSHAKABLE HOPE

Let's be what we were made to be—People of the Promise. Keep this declaration handy. Say it out loud. Fill your lungs with air and your heart with hope, and let the devil himself hear you declare your belief in God's goodness.

We are building our lives on the promises of God.

Because his Word is unbreakable, our hope is unshakable.

We do not stand on the problems of life or the pain in life.

We stand on the great and precious promises of God.

STUDY GUIDE

TWELVE SESSIONS

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

MAX LUCADO



UNSHAKABLE
HOPE

BUILDING OUR LIVES ON THE
PROMISES OF GOD

UNSHAKABLE

HOPE

ALSO BY MAX LUCADO

INSPIRATIONAL

3:16

A Gentle Thunder

A Love Worth Giving

And the Angels Were Silent

Because of Bethlehem

Before Amen

Come Thirsty

Cure for the Common Life

Facing Your Giants

Fearless

Glory Days

God Came Near

Grace

Great Day Every Day

He Chose the Nails

He Still Moves Stones

In the Eye of the Storm

In the Grip of Grace

It's Not About Me

Just Like Jesus

Max on Life

More to Your Story

Next Door Savior

No Wonder They Call Him the Savior

On the Anvil

Outlive Your Life

Six Hours One Friday

The Applause of Heaven

The Great House of God

Traveling Light

When Christ Comes

When God Whispers Your Name

You'll Get Through This

FICTION

Christmas Stories

The Christmas Candle

Miracle at the Higher Grounds Café

BIBLES (GENERAL EDITOR)

Grace for the Moment Daily Bible

The Lucado Life Lessons Study Bible

Children's Daily Devotional Bible

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

A Max Lucado Children's Treasury

Do You Know I Love You, God?

God Forgives Me, and I Forgive You

God Listens When I Pray

Grace for the Moment: 365 Devotions for Kids

Hermie, a Common Caterpillar

Itsy Bitsy Christmas

Just in Case You Ever Wonder

Lucado Treasury of Bedtime Prayers

One Hand, Two Hands

Thank You, God, for Blessing Me

Thank You, God, for Loving Me

The Boy and the Ocean

The Crippled Lamb

The Oak Inside the Acorn

*The Tallest of Small*s

You Are Mine

You Are Special

YOUNG ADULT BOOKS

3:16

It's Not About Me

Make Every Day Count

Wild Grace

You Were Made to Make a Difference

GIFT BOOKS

Fear Not Promise Book

For the Tough Times

God Thinks You're Wonderful

Grace for the Moment

Grace Happens Here

His Name Is Jesus

Let the Journey Begin

Live Loved

Mocha with Max

Safe in the Shepherd's Arms

This Is Love

You Changed My Life

STUDY GUIDE | TWELVE SESSIONS

UNSHAKABLE HOPE

BUILDING OUR LIVES ON THE
PROMISES OF GOD

MAX LUCADO

WITH TOM ANTHONY



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

Unshakable Hope Study Guide

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A Word from Max Lucado

One day when Jesus was teaching the crowds, he told a simple story about two home builders. Each of these individuals wanted to build a house. They had similar supplies and plans and identical aspirations. But one of the builders decided to construct his house on a cheap and easily accessed foundation of sand. The other opted to construct his home on a more expensive, yet more durable, foundation of stone.

Jesus explained that when the rains came down, and the streams rose, and the winds blew strong, the house built on rock did not fall, because it had an unshakable foundation. But when that same storm raged against the house built on sand, it crumpled and fell with a great crash, because it had been built on a shaky foundation (see Matthew 7:24–27). Jesus' point was that what separates the foolish from the wise comes down to *foundation*. It's not enough to just *hear* God's words. To be wise and have a life that will withstand the storms, people need to *build* their lives on the firm foundation of God's promises.

The heroes we will read about in this study understood this principle. They came from different walks of life: rulers, servants, teachers, laborers. They were male, female, single, and married. They were among the rich and the poor. Yet one common denominator united them: they all built their lives on the promises of God. Because of God's promises, Joshua led two million people into enemy territory. Elijah called down fire from heaven. Daniel stood before a powerful king and interpreted his dream. The disciples witnessed miracle after miracle. Paul found a grace worth dying for. John saw a new heaven and new earth.

One writer went so far as to call such saints "heirs of the promise" (Hebrews 6:17 NASB). It was as if the promise was the family fortune and they were smart enough to attend the reading of the will. Their stories were all different, but the theme was the same: *God's promises were polestars in their pilgrimages of faith*. They understood that God would not—indeed, *could* not—break his promises. And when the rains fell and the wind and waves beat against them, they found the strength to endure, for they had built their lives on a firm foundation.

You can find the same strength as these heroes of the Bible. You can choose to build your life on the unbreakable promises of God. As you do, you will find that you have a hope that is unshakable. While the rains will still fall, the streams will still rise, and the winds will still blow, in the end you will still be standing . . . securely anchored in the promises of God.

How to Use This Guide

GOALS OF THIS STUDY

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick” (Proverbs 13:12). A quick look at the world around us confirms the truth of this verse. People today are *dying* for lack of hope. Secularism has sucked the hope out of our society, reducing life to a few decades between birth and hearse. Many believe this world is as good as it gets. And let’s face it—it’s not that good. But as a follower of Christ, you have a distinct advantage. You know that you have the firm foundation of God’s promises on which to build your life. But how do you do this?

The goal of the *Unshakable Hope* small-group study is to provide you with concrete examples from the men and women of the Bible that will show you how to walk with God each day and live out his promises. The objective is to help you begin to change your perspective so you start to filter the events in your world through the promises of God. In this way, when problems arise, instead of giving in

to doubts, fears, and anxieties, you will find yourself saying, “This seems bad, but I know that God said . . .” When struggles threaten, you will find yourself flipping through Scripture, saying, “I think God said something about this.” When comforting others, you will find yourself asking, “Do you know God’s promise on this topic?”

SESSION OUTLINE

Each of the twelve sessions in this study is divided into two parts. The first part is for your own personal study, to be completed prior to your group meetings. In this section, you will be asked to *read* one or two chapters from *Unshakable Hope* and record your responses to the questions that follow. You will then *consider* several passages of Scripture that illuminate the promise for the session and be given several prompts for how to *pray* that promise during the week. You will conclude your personal study time with three questions to help you *reflect* on the promise.

The second part of the study guide is for you to complete when you and your group meet for the week. After a short *getting started* section, in which you will discuss a few opening questions based on the promise for the week, you will watch the *video teaching* from Max Lucado and take notes in the space provided. This will be followed by a *group discussion*, in which you and the other participants reflect on the material covered in the teaching and consider how it applies to your life.

At the close of each session, you and your group members will be given the opportunity to pray for one another and for those who are not yet a part of your fellowship. Use the prompts provided to guide your prayer time as you seek the Lord and thank him for the many promises he has given to you in his Word. Also take a few moments to write down any prayer requests and praise reports from your fellow participants. Don't rush through or shorten this important time together, as it will play an important part in developing the health of the group.

GROUP SIZE

The twelve sessions in *Unshakable Hope* have been designed to be experienced in a group setting such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or other small-group gathering. To ensure everyone has enough time to participate in discussions, large groups should watch the video together and then break into smaller groups of four to six people for discussion.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Each participant should have his or her own study guide, which includes the personal study section, the opening questions you will discuss, notes for the video teaching, discussion questions, and the closing section for prayer requests and praise reports. The group members will also need a copy of the *Unshakable Hope* book to complete the personal studies

before each group meeting. (See the note at the end of each week's personal study for specific chapters to read in the book to prepare for the next week's group meeting.)

FACILITATION

Your group will need to appoint a person to serve as a facilitator. This person will be responsible for starting the video and keeping track of time during discussions and activities. Facilitators may also read questions aloud and monitor discussions, prompting participants to respond and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate. If you have been chosen for this role, there are additional instructions and resources in the next section of this guide to help you lead your group members through the study.

Group Facilitator Tips

Thank you for your willingness to lead your group through *Unshakable Hope*. What you have chosen to do is important, and much good fruit can come from studies like this. The rewards of being a leader are different from those of participating, and we hope that as you lead you will find your own walk with Jesus deepened by this experience. To ensure a successful group experience, be sure to read the following information before beginning.

==== STRUCTURING DISCUSSION TIMES ====

As your group's facilitator, you might be asking yourself, "What am I supposed to accomplish with this study?" Here are a few goals you might set for your group:

- **Discover the truth.** The Bible reveals the truth about who God is, what he has promised to us, and who we are created to be. A successful group wrestles with Scripture in order to find these truths.

- **Apply the truth.** It doesn't do much good to know the truth if we don't act on what we are learning! A successful group seeks to apply the truth to their lives.
- **Be honest and authentic.** Many people feel pressure to act "spiritual" when they are in religious environments, masking their true thoughts and feelings. But this behavior only stunts spiritual growth. Successful groups cultivate a safe place for group members to be authentic and honest with one another.
- **Participate.** The person who does the most talking often does the most learning. Therefore, groups that seek to include everyone in the conversation experience the most progress. Successful groups engage all their members in their discussions.

At the end of each group meeting, ask yourself these questions:

- Did we learn something new about God and ourselves?
- Are people actively seeking to apply these truths to their lives?
- Do people feel comfortable talking honestly about their faith?

- Have I engaged all members of the group in the discussion?

If you can answer yes to any of these questions, you are facilitating effectively.

CREATING A SUCCESSFUL ENVIRONMENT

Leading a group can be overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be. Consider these tips to help you create a successful group environment.

Pray: As you prepare for your group meeting, ask God to give you wisdom in choosing discussion questions, courage in creating an authentic environment, and insight into the truths he wants to reveal to your group.

Prepare: Spend time before the group meeting reading over the study guide and choosing which questions work best for your group. If you are struggling through the study guide or seem unprepared, people may feel more anxiety.

Prime: Your group will be as honest and authentic as you are willing to be. Set the tone for the group by being open about the strengths and weaknesses of your faith. The

group will follow your lead. This principle also applies to life application. If you are trying to apply the truth of each lesson to your life, the rest of the group will follow you.

Punctual: Start and stop on time. No matter how long your group meets, it's your job to keep things on track. Make a budget of time for each section of the study and stick to it. It might be uncomfortable to cut people off at times and move on, but the group will respect you for doing so.

==== COVERING THE STUDY MATERIAL ====

Design your own discussion. Don't feel pressured to use all of the materials found in this study guide. Select the modes of lesson engagement that fit your timeframe and your group's learning style. This study was written for a vast array of personalities, learning styles, and levels of spiritual maturity, so pick and choose the questions that seem to fit your group the best.

Your group might gravitate to one or two of the discussion segments but not another, and that's fine. Choose one or two questions from the segments that you feel your group will benefit from the most. Don't skip over the section where the group members offer insights from their personal study time. This will encourage them each week to study on their own and complete the exercises ahead of your group time.

===== NAVIGATING GROUP DYNAMICS =====

Leading a group through *Unshakable Hope* will prove to be highly rewarding both to you and your group members—but this doesn't mean you will not encounter any challenges along the way! Discussions can get off track. Group members may not be sensitive to the needs and ideas of others. Some might worry they will be expected to talk about matters that make them feel awkward. Others may express comments that result in disagreements. To help ease this strain on you and the group, consider the following ground rules:

- When someone raises a question or comment that is off the main topic, suggest you deal with it another time, or, if you feel led to go in that direction, let the group know you will be spending some time discussing it.
- If someone asks a question you don't know how to answer, admit it and move on. At your discretion, feel free to invite group members to comment on questions that call for personal experience.
- If you find one or two people are dominating the discussion time, direct a few questions to others in the group. Outside the main group time, ask the more dominating members to help you draw out the quieter ones. Work to make them a part of the solution instead of the problem.

- When a disagreement occurs, encourage the members to process the matter in love. Encourage those on opposite sides to restate what they heard the other side say, and then invite each side to evaluate if that perception is accurate. Lead the group in examining other Scriptures related to the topic and look for common ground.

When any of these issues arise, encourage your group members to “love one another” (John 13:34), “live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18), and “be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19). This will make your group time more rewarding and beneficial for everyone who attends.

Thank you again for your willingness to lead your group. May God reward your efforts and dedication and make your time together fruitful for his kingdom.

SESSION ONE

You Are Stamped with God's Image

KEY STORY:

God creates humankind
(GENESIS 1:26-30)

GOD'S PROMISE:

Let us make human beings in our image,
make them reflecting our nature.
(GENESIS 1:26 MSG)

MY PROMISE:

I will embrace my role as God's image bearer.

PERSONAL STUDY

Did you know God made you to be more like him than anything else in all creation? The Bible says you were made in his image. Humans are the only part of God's glorious creation with this special description. You are a diamond, a rose, a jewel, purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ. The New Testament describes a progressive work of God to shape you into his image. As you fellowship with God, read his Word, obey his commands, and seek to understand and reflect his character, something wonderful begins to emerge. God comes out of you. You say things God would say. You do things God would do. You forgive, you share, and you love. It is as if God is scrubbing the smudge off an old coin. In time, an image begins to appear. God's goal is simply this: to rub away anything that is not of him, so his inborn image can be seen in you. You are an image bearer of God, and you can celebrate that promise.

READ

This week, you and your group will be studying God's promise in his Word that you are stamped with his own image. Before your group meeting, read chapters 1 and 2 in *Unshakable Hope*: "God's Great and Precious Promises" and "You Are Stamped with God's Image." Spend some time using the following personal study guide to reflect on what you've read.

1. How does God's view of covenants affect your view of him?

2. Why is it important to know that God's promises are irrevocable?

3. How does this week's promise affect the way you look at other people?

4. What does it mean to you that you are stamped in God's image?

CONSIDER

Now take some time to allow this promise from God to take root in your heart by reflecting on the following passages of Scripture. Begin by preparing your heart in prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal truth as you engage God.

1. Read **Genesis 1:26–31**. What is the significance of the creation of men and women being the pinnacle of the creation story?

2. Read **Colossians 3:5–10**. How does Paul connect the idea of the “new self” to the truth of your role as God’s image bearer?

3. Read **2 Corinthians 3:18**. How are you being transformed into the image of God? How does knowing that this is God’s desire affect your desire for transformation?

4. Read **Romans 8:28–30**. How do you reconcile the idea you were created in the image of God but still need to be conformed to the image of Jesus?

PRAY

- Slowly read God's Promise for this week three times: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature" (Genesis 1:26 MSG). By the third reading, try to have this promise memorized so you can repeat it back to God in prayer.
- Personalize God's Promise for this week. For example, you could pray, *"Father, I have been made in your image. Because of this truth, I have great value in your eyes. This is my identity. Amen."*
- Prayerfully read this week's My Promise as a declaration: *"I will embrace my role as God's image bearer."* Consider what specific next steps you could take to apply this promise to your life.

REFLECT

1. Ask God to reveal anything he wants you to apply based on this week's promise. For example, you could pray, *"Father, is there any truth or action you would like me to apply*

from this week?” Listen in silence for several minutes to see if God places anything on your heart. Consider how those thoughts or nudges align with God’s Word as you write them in the space below.

2. Consider what fresh discoveries surfaced from this week’s reading and personal study. Write anything that you would like to share with the group in the space below.

3. Close by thinking about an action step you could take to increase your awareness of this promise from God or share it with another person. Write this action below.

GROUP STUDY

GETTING STARTED

Welcome to session one of *Unshakable Hope*. If this is your first time together as a group, take a moment to introduce yourself to one another before watching the video. Open the session with prayer, and then ask one person to share a brief three-minute version of his or her spiritual journey. Following this, read this week's God's Promise and My Promise aloud as a group (see page 19), and then answer one or more of the following questions:

- How did this session's Bible reading challenge or encourage you?
- What characteristics do humans have that reflect God's image?
- How are humans different from the rest of God's creation?

===== VIDEO TEACHING =====

As you watch the video for session one, use the following outline to record the main points and takeaways from the teaching.

What it means to have *unshakable hope* in our lives

The common denominator the heroes of the Bible shared

Each of us is made in God's image and carry some of his attributes

The arrival of sin distorted this image but did not destroy it

Sanctification describes the progressive work of God to shape us into his image

Every person deserves dignity and respect because we are all made in God's image

===== **GROUP DISCUSSION** =====

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. What statement in the video teaching affected you the most? Why?

2. From the beginning, the Bible makes a case for the existence of God. But what are some of the ways the Bible also makes the case for the *dependability* of God?

3. What are some things in today's world that make you feel anything but important? How will you reinforce the truth of being an image bearer of God every day this week?

4. How can you encourage others who may be having trouble accepting that God has created them in his image?

5. What is your specific action step to live out this promise of God this week?

PRAY

One of the most important things you can do with those in your community is to pray for one another. This is not simply a closing prayer to end the group time but an opportunity to share prayer requests, review how God has answered past prayers and fulfilled his promises, and actually pray for one another. Use the questions below to shape and grow your group's experience, and then write down specific prayer requests and praise reports.

- How can you praise God for making you an image bearer?
- In what specific ways will you ask God to help you build your life on this identity?

YOU ARE STAMPED WITH GOD'S IMAGE

- How can you help others realize they have been stamped with God's image?

NAME	REQUESTS AND PRAISES

===== **NEXT WEEK** =====

Next week, you and your group will look at how God *promises* that you will have victory over Satan. Be sure to complete the personal study before you attend the group meeting.

TWELVE LESSONS
FOR EACH AGE GROUP



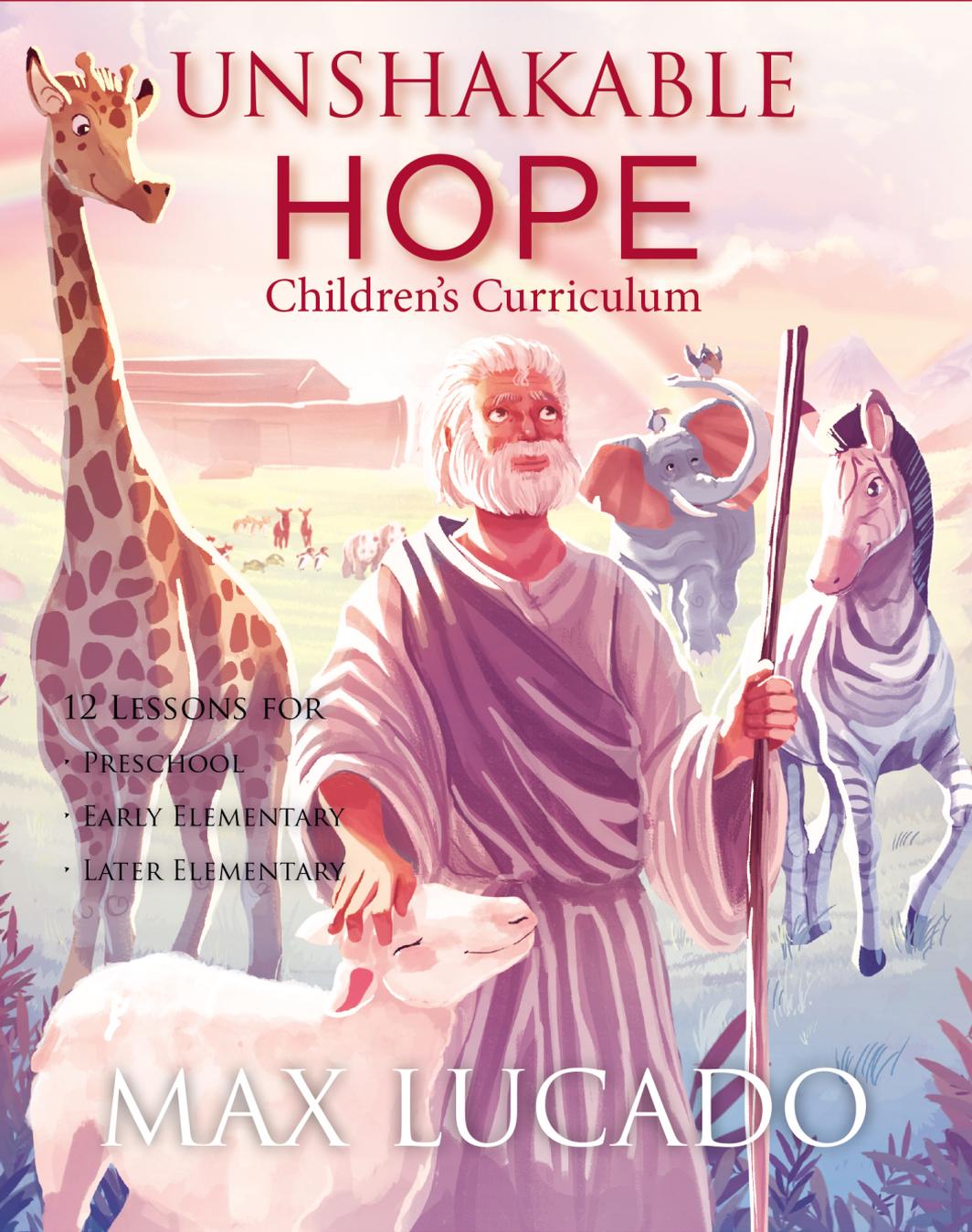
UNSHAKABLE HOPE

Children's Curriculum

12 LESSONS FOR

- PRESCHOOL
- EARLY ELEMENTARY
- LATER ELEMENTARY

MAX LUCADO





LESSON 1

MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

CHARACTER:

God

BIBLE BASIS:

Genesis 1

STORYBOOK BASIS:

Chapter 1, "God Will Make You Like Jesus"
in *God Always Keeps His Promises*

KEY VERSE:

Genesis 1:27a (NIRV): God created human
beings . . . to be like himself.

KEY IDEA:

God made me in his image.

Master Supply List

- Adult and Baby pictures
- Bible
- *God Always Keeps His Promises: Unshakable Hope for Kids* storybook
- large display numbers 1–7
- markers
- easel
- Family Page (1 per child)

Optional Supplies

You will need the following supplies based on which option(s) you choose in Step 3 | Explore More:

- **Option 1:** God Made Me! coloring sheet (1 per child), crayons
- **Option 2:** Hula-Hoops™ (1 for every 2 children)
- **Option 3:** craft foam sheets or card stock, silver craft paper, large craft sticks, scissors, glue, permanent marker, stick-on gems or foam shapes
- **Option 4:** audiovisual equipment to play music or project a video
- **Option 5:** Creation script (1 copy), cardboard tube or rolled paper, large display numbers 1–7

STEP 1 | Come Together (10 minutes)

Supplies: Adult and Baby pictures

Teacher Prep: Print the Adult and Baby pictures.

CREATE INTEREST

- **SHOW** the picture of the horses.
- **SAY:** Here is a baby horse with its mother.
- **ASK:** How is this baby like its mother? How is it different? (*possibly: like—same color, covered in hair, running on four legs; different—smaller, shorter tail*)
- **REPEAT** for the other two pictures.
- **SAY:** Babies are like their parents in some ways and different in other ways. That's because their parents created the baby. A horse can't create a baby penguin, and a penguin can't have a baby person.
- **CONTINUE:** God made the whole world and all the animals and all the people. He made each of us. When God made people, he made them special. God created people in his own image. That means we can imitate God. We are like God in some ways and different from God in other ways.
- **ASK:** How do you think we are like God? How do you think we are different from God? (*Accept children's answers without overcorrecting them. This will give you insight into their understanding of what God is like.*)



KEY VERSE

- **INTRODUCE** this week's Key Verse. Repeat the verse slowly a few times, along with hand motions.

Genesis 1:27a

<i>God</i>	<i>(point toward heaven)</i>
<i>created human beings . . .</i>	<i>(spread arms open, palms up)</i>
<i>to be like himself.</i>	<i>(point thumbs to chest)</i>

- **SAY:** One way God made people special is that he gave us a job to do. He gave us the job of taking caring of everything else he made.

PRAYER

- **PRAY** aloud with the children: God, you made everything in the whole world. And you made each of us. Please help us grow up to be like you. Amen.

STEP 2 | Hear the Story (20 minutes)

Supplies: Bible, *God Always Keeps His Promises* storybook, large display numbers 1–7, markers, easel

Teacher Prep: Prepare large numbers (cut out or drawn on poster paper).

INTRODUCTION

- **OPEN** your Bible to Genesis 1 to show the children where the lesson begins.
- **TELL** children that they will be hearing from the Bible about how God made the world and everything in it.
- **SAY:** God made the world in seven days. When I hold up a number, you help me say which day it is.

READ THE BIBLE STORY

- **DISPLAY** each number before you read about each day of creation from Genesis 1:3–26, prompting the children to say the number aloud. As you read, skim to abridge the passage (e.g., Hold up number 1. Prompt children to say “Day 1” aloud).
- Say: “On day one, God created light and separated it from the darkness.”
- **READ** aloud pages 10–13 of *God Always Keeps His Promises* storybook.



REVIEW GENESIS 1

- ASK: How many days of creation were there? (*six, followed by a day of rest*)
- REVIEW what God created on each day: 1—light, 2—sky, 3—land, sea, plants, 4—sun, moon, stars, 5—fish, birds, 6—land animals, people. As you show each number again to review, quickly sketch on it what was created that day.
- SAY: God made everything in the whole world, but he made people special. We are made in God's image. That means we are like God in some ways, and we are different from God in some ways. Giraffes aren't like God, sharks aren't like God, and ladybugs aren't like God. Just people are like God.
- ASK: How can we learn more about God? How can we learn to be more like him? (*possibly: read the Bible, come to church, pray*)

STEP 3 | Explore More

Choose from these activity options to help children explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: LET'S COLOR! (15 MINUTES)

Supplies: God Made Me! coloring sheet (1 per child), crayons

Teacher Prep: Print and photocopy the God Made Me! coloring sheet.

- GIVE each child a copy of the God Made Me! coloring sheet to color.
- As children color, ENCOURAGE them to talk about ways we are like God and ways we are different from God. Gently redirect any misconceptions they may have. For example, we cannot make plants and trees, but we can grow new plants and trees from the seeds God makes. We can be loving like God is loving. We can be slow to anger like God is slow to anger.

OPTION 2: GOD AND PEOPLE (15 MINUTES)

Supplies: Hula-Hoops (1 for every 2 children)

Teacher Prep: Set the Hula-Hoops on the floor with plenty of room around each one. Divide the class into pairs.

- DIRECT each pair to stand near their Hula-Hoop, facing the center.
- SAY: We are made in God's image, which means we are like God in some ways and different in other ways. When I tell you something about God, jump into the Hula-Hoop. When I tell you something about people, jump out of the Hula-Hoop.



- READ aloud each of the descriptors below. After each one, reinforce the correct response.
 - ✦ God is always perfect. (*jump in*)
 - ✦ People make mistakes sometimes. (*jump out*)
 - ✦ God has the power to do anything. (*jump in*)
 - ✦ People cannot do everything. (*jump out*)
 - ✦ God is spirit. (*jump in*)
 - ✦ People have a body made of bones and skin. (*jump out*)
 - ✦ God is everywhere at the same time. (*jump in*)
 - ✦ People can only be in one place at a time. (*jump out*)
 - ✦ God knows everything. (*jump in*)
 - ✦ People don't know everything. (*jump out*)
 - ✦ God made everything out of nothing. (*jump in*)
 - ✦ People can only make things with what God has given us. (*jump out*)
 - ✦ Both God and people can love others.
- EXPLAIN that this last descriptor is a way that God and people are alike. Show the children how to jump with one foot in the Hula-Hoop and one foot out.

OPTION 3: GOD MADE ME SPECIAL! (15 MINUTES)

Supplies: craft foam sheets or card stock, silver craft paper, large craft sticks, scissors, glue, permanent marker, stick-on gems or foam shapes

Teacher Prep: Cut the foam sheets into 6 x 6-inch squares (1 per child). Cut the silver craft paper into 4 x 4-inch squares and glue into the center of the foam sheet. Glue a craft stick to the back of each to make a hand mirror. Use a permanent marker to write, "God made me special!" on each frame.

- GIVE each child a hand mirror craft.
- INSTRUCT them to stick the gems and/or shapes around the frame of the mirror. As they do so, circulate and remind each child as they look into their "mirror" that they are made in God's image.
- EXPLAIN that one way we are like God is that we can love others. Invite children to call out the names of special people both God and they love.



OPTION 4: PRAISE AND WORSHIP (15 MINUTES)

Supplies: audiovisual equipment to play music or project a video

Recommended song: “Thank You Lord for Making Me” by Vincent Barlow, © 1996 Ever Devoted Music (Admin. by Willow Creek Association)

- **Potential sources:** This [YouTube link](#) and [CCLI # 2588137](#)
- **Purpose for this song:** Children will love acting out each animal’s part in this celebration of God’s creation.

Recommended song: “My God Is So Big” by CedarMont Kids, © Stolen Pride (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing)

- **Potential sources:** This [YouTube link](#) and this [CCLI # 2501437](#)
- **Purpose for this song:** This children’s favorite is another reminder that our Creator is powerful (and awesome and mighty!).

OPTION 5: ACT IT OUT (20 MINUTES)

Supplies: Creation script (1 copy), cardboard tube or rolled paper, large display numbers 1–7

Teacher Prep: Print the Creation script. Prepare large numbers (cut out or drawn on poster paper).

- **SAY:** God is so great that he made the entire universe just by speaking. Whatever God said, that’s exactly what happened. As I read the story of creation, you’ll help count the days.
- **READ** the script, speaking through the cardboard tube for the voice of God and cuing the children to say the number of the day.
- **ASK:** What was the last thing God made? (*people*) What makes people the most special of all God made? (*We’re like God in some ways.*)



STEP 4 | Going Home (5 minutes)

Supplies: Family Page (1 per child)

Teacher Prep: Print and photocopy the Family Page.

- GIVE each child a copy of this week's Family Page.
- SAY: Give this page to your family when they pick you up. It will remind you to tell your family about how you are made in God's image.
- INVITE children to tell you what they remember about Creation.
- REVIEW today's lesson and Key Idea as you wait for the children to get picked up.
- CHALLENGE children to practice saying today's Key Verse along with the hand motions.
- REMIND each child to take home any activity sheets or craft projects and the Family Page.





FAMILY PAGE | LESSON 1:
MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

CHARACTER:

God

BIBLE BASIS:

Genesis 1, as told in *God Always Keeps His Promises*
storybook, Chapter 1

KEY VERSE:

Genesis 1:27a (NIRV): God created human beings . . .
to be like himself.

KEY IDEA:

God made me in his image.

How to Use This Page

This week, your family can read Chapter 1, “God Will Make You Like Jesus” in *God Always Keeps His Promises* to help your child remember the lesson. Use the *Table Talk* questions below to start a discussion around the dinner table, while driving in the car, or just about anywhere. The *Living Faith* activity is designed to remind your child of the Bible lesson through a drama or other engaging activity. The *Extra Mile* idea provides interactive ways for your child to connect with the Bible.

TABLE TALK

1. What are some things God made?
 2. What is God like?
 3. What are some ways you are like God?
-

LIVING FAITH

Option 1

The account of creation in Genesis 1 is one of the most amazing parts of the Bible! Help your child envision these miraculous seven days by creating a mural or poster. Here's an example of how you might choose to divide the work space, but use your own poster paper:

In the beginning . . .	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7

Then, let your child's imagination take over as he or she fills the scene with drawings, magazine cutouts, or other props. Be sure to have a Bible on hand to refer to.

Option 2

Create a life-size drawing by tracing your child's body on butcher paper. Help him or her decorate the figure using markers, scrap paper, fabric, yarn, and other craft supplies. As they work, read Psalm 145:8–9 interspersed with, "These verses remind us what God is like. Because we are made in his image, we can imitate him! Show yourself doing these good things."

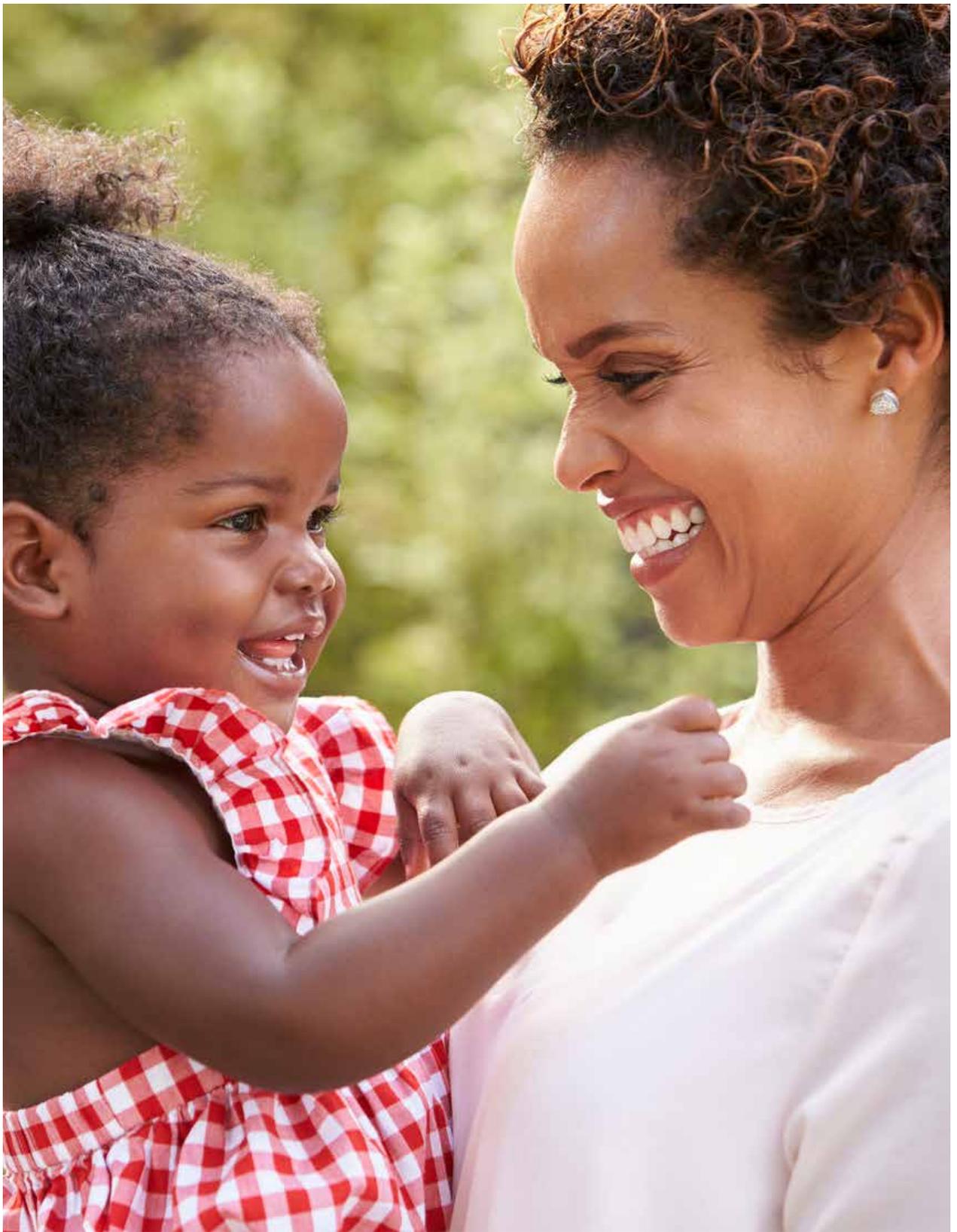
EXTRA MILE

- Look for opportunities to point out your child's caring actions—actions that imitate God. "Wow, you showed patience!" when she solves a puzzle or "I love that God made you so caring" when he empathizes with others.
- If you have a plant, turn some of the responsibility over to your child (under appropriate supervision). As your child waters or pots the plant say that God asked us to take care of the garden. Good work is part of being made in God's image.
- Every person is made by God in his likeness. As a family, find a way to celebrate God's love for every person by serving others both in your family and outside of it. Go sing for seniors at a nursing home, set the table in your home, or make cards for fire fighters. Come up with a service project that works best for your family and your area.





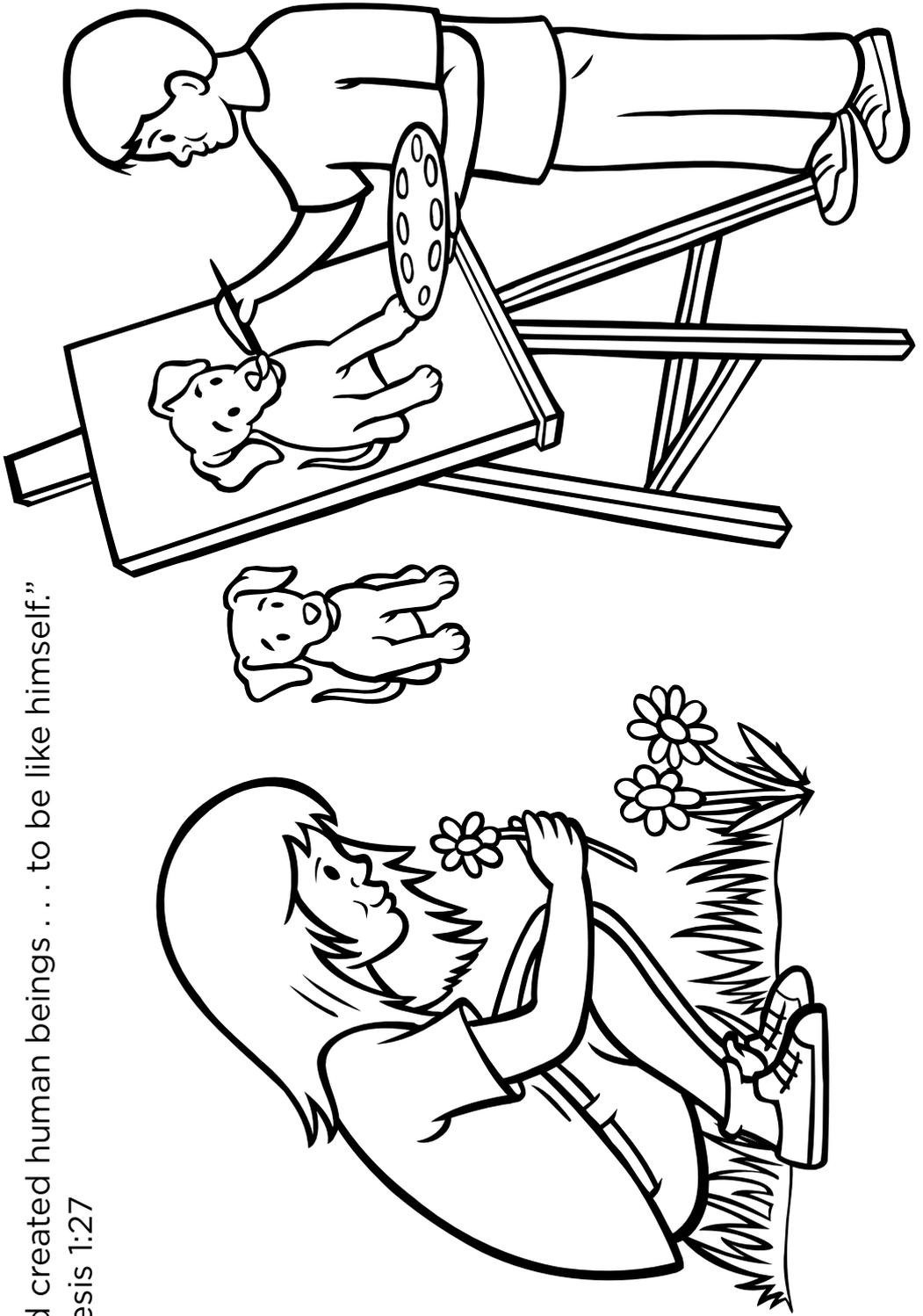




Name _____ Date _____

God Made Me!

“God created human beings . . . to be like himself.”
Genesis 1:27





CREATION SCRIPT

CHARACTERS

- Teacher
- Voice of God
- Children

Teacher: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth didn't have any shape. It was empty and dark. Then God spoke.

Voice of God: Let there be light.

Teacher: There was light. God separated the light from the darkness. That was day . . .

Children: One!

Voice of God: Let there be a huge space between the waters.

Teacher: God called the huge space "sky." That was day . . .

Children: Two!

Voice of God: Let dry ground appear.

Teacher: God called the dry ground "land." He called all the water "seas."

Voice of God: Let the land produce plants and trees.

Teacher: So the land produced plants and trees. That was day . . .

Children: Three!

Voice of God: Let there be lights in the sky. Let them separate the day from the night.

Teacher: God made the sun. He also made the moon and stars. That was day . . .

Children: Four!

Voice of God: Let the seas be filled with living things. Let birds fly above the earth across the sky.

Teacher: God created every kind of animal that lives in the seas. He created every kind of bird that flies. That was day . . .

Children: Five!

Voice of God: Let the land produce every kind of living creature.

Teacher: God made every kind of farm animal and wild animal.

Voice of God: Let us make people so that they are like us. Let them rule over all the animals.

Teacher: So God created people in his own likeness. He created them to be like himself. That was day . . .

Children: Six!

Teacher: After God made people he said it was VERY good. You and I are special creations of a very loving God. He is proud of you! He is happy he made you!





LESSON 1

MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

CHARACTER:

God

BIBLE BASIS:

Genesis 1

STORYBOOK BASIS:

Chapter 1, "God Will Make You Like Jesus"
in *God Always Keeps His Promises*

KEY VERSE:

Genesis 1:26a (ICB): Then God said, "Let us make
human beings in our image and likeness."

KEY IDEA:

God made me in his image.

Master Supply List

- photograph of one of the children
- hand mirror
- Bible
- *God Always Keeps His Promises: Unshakable Hope for Kids* storybook
- clipboards
- Days of Creation worksheet (1 per child)
- pencils
- Family Page (1 per child)

Optional Supplies

You will need the following supplies based on which option(s) you choose in Step 3 | Explore More:

- **Option 1:** What Is God Like? worksheet (1 per child), pencils, Bible, chalkboard or whiteboard, chalk or marker
- **Option 2:** Hula-Hoops™ (1 for every 2–3 children)
- **Option 3:** Child Outline template (1 per child), pencils, crayons, permanent marker, tape
- **Option 4:** audiovisual equipment to play music or project a video
- **Option 5:** Creation script (3 copies), cardboard tube or rolled paper

STEP 1 | Come Together (10 minutes)

Supplies: photograph of one of the children, hand mirror

Teacher Prep: Print a photograph of one of the children.

CREATE INTEREST

- INVITE the child in the photograph to stand in front of the group.
- HOLD UP the photograph next to the child.
- ASK: (referring to the photo) Is this [child's name]? (*No, it's an image of that child.*)
- ASK: How is the photo similar to [child]? How is it different? (*take responses*)
- STAND with your back to the group. Look at the students through the hand mirror. Call on a volunteer to stand in front of the group.
- ASK: (referring to the reflection) Is this [child's name]? (*No, it's a reflection of that child.*)
- ASK: How is the reflection similar to [child]? How is it different? (*take responses*)
- SAY: God, who created the whole universe, made you. He made you in his own image. That means you are like God in some ways and different in some ways. Today, we'll learn what it means to be made in God's image.

KEY VERSE

- INTRODUCE this week's Key Verse. Repeat the verse slowly a few times, along with hand motions.



Genesis 1:26a

Then God said, (point toward heaven)

“Let us make human beings (spread arms open, palms up)
in our image and likeness.” (use finger to draw circle around face)

- SAY: One way we are like God is that we care for the world God made. God gave us a job to do. He gave us the job of taking caring of everything else he made.

PRAYER

- PRAY aloud with the children: God, you made everything in the whole universe. And you made each of us. Please help us get to know you better so we can be more like you. Amen.

STEP 2 | Hear the Story (20 minutes)

Supplies: Bible, *God Always Keeps His Promises* storybook, clipboards, Days of Creation template (1 per child), pencils

Teacher Prep: Print and photocopy the Days of Creation worksheet. Give each child a clipboard with a worksheet and a pencil.

INTRODUCTION

- TELL children that they will be hearing the story of creation from the very beginning of the Bible.
- SAY: As I read about each day of creation, draw a quick sketch of what God did on that day.

READ THE BIBLE STORY

- READ aloud Genesis 1:1–26.
- EMPHASIZE the day and read slowly what was created so children can make quick sketches on their Days of Creation template.
- READ aloud pages 10–13 of *God Always Keeps His Promises* storybook.

REVIEW

- ASK: How many days of creation were there? (*six, followed by a day of rest*)



- ASK: What was created on each day? (1—light, 2—sky, 3—land, sea, plants, 4—sun, moon, stars, 5—fish, birds, 6—land animals, humans)
- SAY: God made everything in the whole universe. This shows us that God is powerful, and loving and has imagination. We are made in God's image. That means we are like God in some ways, like the way we can be loving. It also means we are different from God in some ways, like not having the power to make animals.
- ASK: What does it mean to be made in God's image and likeness? (*We can imitate God. We are not God but we can be like him. We are like God in some ways and different in other ways.*)
- ASK: How are we like God? How are we different from God? (*possibly: alike—we can think, imagine, communicate, love; different—cannot create, limited power*)
- ASK: How can we learn more about God? How can we learn to be more like him? (*possibly: read the Bible, come to church, pray*)
- SAY: Being made in God's image makes you special. He made you in his own image to do good works, such as being thoughtful, helping people, telling the truth, and other actions that show God's love to others.

STEP 3 | Explore More

Choose from these activity options to help children explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: WHAT IS GOD LIKE? (20 MINUTES)

Supplies: What Is God Like? worksheet (1 per child), pencils, Bible, chalkboard or whiteboard, chalk or marker

Teacher Prep: Print and photocopy the What Is God Like? worksheet. Note that there are two different worksheets to choose from to best suit the needs of your students.

- GIVE each child a What Is God Like? worksheet.
- SAY: I'm going to read some verses out loud from the Bible. Listen for the clues that tell us what God is like.
- READ aloud each verse.
- ASK children what the missing word is.
- WRITE the word on the board and help children copy the necessary letters onto their paper. Briefly talk about each trait of God and how it is similar to or different from people.



- GUIDE children in solving the final question by writing the circled letters in order in the blanks. Point out that both God and people make promises, but God always keeps his promises.

Note: The answers are: (1) perfect, (2) truth, (3) holy, (4) same, (5) faithful, (6) spirit, (7) love, (8) promise

OPTION 2: GOD AND PEOPLE (15 MINUTES)

Supplies: Hula-Hoops (1 for every 2–3 children)

Teacher Prep: Set the Hula-Hoops on the floor with plenty of room around each one.

Divide the class into groups of 2 or 3.

- DIRECT each group to stand around their Hula-Hoop, facing the center.
- SAY: We are made in God's image, which means we are like God in some ways and different in other ways. I'll read you some descriptions. You'll decide whether they describe God, people, or both. If the description describes God, jump into the Hula-Hoop. If it describes people, jump out of the Hula-Hoop.
- ASK: What if the description is true about God and people? (*Jump with one foot in and one foot out of the Hula-Hoop.*)
- READ aloud each of the descriptions below. After each one, reinforce the correct response.
 - ✦ Is always perfect (*God*)
 - ✦ Makes mistakes sometimes (*people*)
 - ✦ Has the power to do anything (*God*)
 - ✦ Is loving (*both*)
 - ✦ Is spirit (*God*)
 - ✦ Has a body made of bones and skin (*people*)
 - ✦ Is everywhere at the same time (*God*)
 - ✦ Has a home in heaven (*both*)
 - ✦ Doesn't know everything (*people*)
 - ✦ Rules over other living things (*both*)
 - ✦ Can create something out of nothing (*God*)
 - ✦ Can live forever (*both*)
 - ✦ Can imitate God's goodness (*people*)



OPTION 3: GOD MADE ME! (20 MINUTES)

Supplies: Child Outline template (1 per child), pencils, crayons, permanent marker, tape

Teacher Prep: Print and photocopy the Child Outline template.

- GIVE each child a Child Outline template.
- SHOW them how to write their name on the bottom line and fold it under so it doesn't show.
- INSTRUCT children to decorate their figure with hair, face, and clothing so it looks like them. As they do so, circulate and ask each child what traits God has given them that make them special. Write their suggestions in the space around the figure in marker.
- DISPLAY children's work under the heading "Made in God's Image" in a place where others can enjoy it. Parents will have fun guessing which one is their child and then checking under the fold to see if they're right!

OPTION 4: PRAISE AND WORSHIP (15 MINUTES)

Supplies: audiovisual equipment to play music or project a video

Recommended song: "Awesome God" by Rich Mullens, © 1988 Universal Music—Brentwood Benson Publishing

- **Potential sources:** This [YouTube link](#) and [CCLI # 41099](#)
- **Purpose for this song:** Children will celebrate God's "wisdom, power, and love" with this moving song.

Recommended song: "My God Is So Big" by Cedarment Kids, © Stolen Pride (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing)

- **Potential sources:** This [YouTube link](#) and this [CCLI # 2501437](#)
- **Purpose for this song:** This children's favorite is another reminder that our Creator is powerful (and awesome and mighty!).



OPTION 5: ACT IT OUT (20 MINUTES)

Supplies: Creation script (3 copies), cardboard tube or rolled paper

Teacher Prep: Print and photocopy the Creation script.

- **ASSIGN** the roles of Narrator 1 and Voice of God (stronger readers or yourself) as well as Narrator 2 (another reader). Alternately, you can read both Narrator parts and speak through the tube to play the Voice of God.
- **GIVE** the Voice of God the cardboard tube to speak through.
- **SAY:** God is so powerful that he created the entire universe just by speaking. Whatever God said, that's exactly what happened.
- **PRACTICE** leading the class in saying, "And that's exactly what happened." They'll say the part of the Chorus on your cue.
- **ACT** out the skit according to the roles you assigned.
- **ASK:** What was the last thing God made? (*people*) What makes people the most special of all God made? (*We're like God in some ways.*)

STEP 4 | Going Home (5 minutes)

Supplies: Family Page (1 per child)

Teacher Prep: Print and photocopy the Family Page.

- **GIVE** each child a copy of this week's Family Page.
- **SAY:** Give this page to your family when they pick you up. It will remind you to tell your family about how you are made in God's image.
- **INVITE** children to tell you what they remember about creation.
- **REVIEW** today's lesson and Key Idea as you wait for the children to get picked up.
- **CHALLENGE** children to practice saying today's Key Verse along with the hand motions.
- **REMIND** each child to take home any activity sheets or craft projects and the Family Page.





FAMILY PAGE | LESSON 1:
MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

CHARACTER: God

BIBLE BASIS:

Genesis 1, as told in *God Always Keeps His Promises* storybook, Chapter 1

KEY VERSE:

Genesis 1:26a (ICB): Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image and likeness."

KEY IDEA:

God made me in his image.

How to Use This Page

This week, your family can read Chapter 1, "God Will Make You Like Jesus" in *God Always Keeps His Promises* to help your child remember the lesson. Use the *Table Talk* questions to start a discussion around the dinner table, while driving in the car, or just about anywhere. The *Living Faith* activity is designed to remind your child of the Bible lesson through a drama or other engaging activity. The *Extra Mile* idea provides

interactive ways for your child to connect with the Bible.

TABLE TALK

1. What's one imaginary animal you wish God created?
2. What three words do you think best describe God?
3. What are some ways you are like God?

LIVING FAITH

Option 1

The account of creation in Genesis 1 is one of the most amazing parts of the Bible! Help your child envision these miraculous seven days by creating a mural or poster. Here's an example of how you might choose to divide the work space, but use your own poster paper:

In the beginning . . .	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7

Then, let your child's imagination take over as he or she fills the scene with drawings, figures, pictures cut from magazines, or other props. Be sure to have a Bible on hand to refer to.

Option 2

Create a life-size drawing by tracing your child's body on butcher paper. Have him or her decorate the figure using markers, scrap paper, fabric, yarn, and other craft supplies. When it's done, add labels that call attention to actions your child can take to imitate God. (Samples from that Psalm include: do wonderful deeds, be gracious,

be kind and tender, stay slow to get angry, full of love, good to all, shows deep concern, rule, faithful in everything he does, takes good care of all those who fall, lifts up all those who feel helpless, give exactly when they need it, open your hand and satisfy needs of every living creature, right in everything he does, faithful in everything he does, ready to help all those who call out to him, satisfies the needs of those who have respect for him, hears their cry, watches over all those who love him.)

EXTRA MILE

- To understand more fully "the image of God," get to know the character or nature of God. As a family, read the following passages from the Bible: Psalm 145; Romans 11:3–36; Daniel 2:20–23; Acts 17:24–27.
- Where does Jesus fit in? As fully God and fully man, Jesus is unique. See what the Bible says about the nature of Jesus in 2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15; and Hebrews 1:3.
- God made every person in his likeness. As a family, find a way to celebrate God's love for every person by serving those who might be overlooked. Go sing for seniors at a nursing home, serve food to the needy, or donate items to children in foster homes. Come up with a service project that works best for your family and your area.

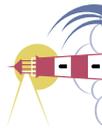


Name _____ Date _____

Days of Creation

Draw a quick sketch of what God created on each day.

In the beginning	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7



Name _____ Date _____

What Is God Like?

Listen to each verse. Write the missing letter in the spaces.

1. God is e r f e c t (Matthew 5:48)

2. God is t u t h (John 14:17)

3. God is h l y (Psalm 99:3)

4. God is always the s a e (Hebrews 13:8)

5. God is f a t h f u l (1 Corinthians 10:13)

6. God is p i r i t (John 4:24)

7. God is l o v (1 John 4:8)

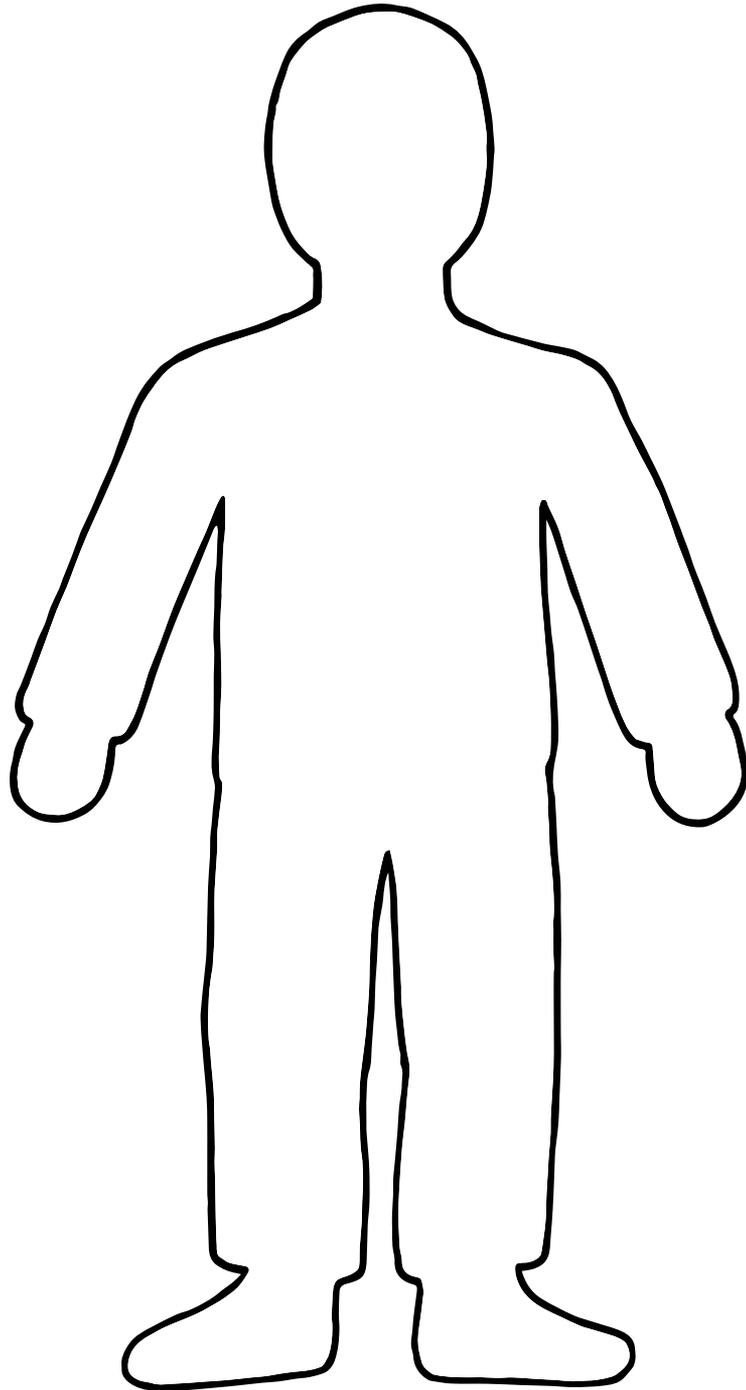
8. Write the missing letters from 1-7 to finish the sentence.

We can always trust God's s!



“You created the deepest parts of my being.
How you made me is amazing and wonderful.”

Psalm 139:13-14





CREATION

CHARACTERS

- Narrator 1
- Narrator 2
- Voice of God
- Chorus

Narrator 1: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth didn't have any shape.

Narrator 2: It was empty and dark.

Voice of God: Let there be light.

Chorus: And that's exactly what happened.

Narrator 1: There was light. God separated the light from the darkness.

Narrator 2: That was day one.

Voice of God: Let there be a huge space between the waters.

Chorus: And that's exactly what happened.

Narrator 1: God called the huge space "sky."

Narrator 2: That was day two.

Voice of God: Let dry ground appear.

Chorus: And that's exactly what happened.

Narrator 1: God called the dry ground "land." He called all the water "seas."

Voice of God: Let the land produce plants and trees.

Chorus: And that's exactly what happened.

Narrator 1: So the land produced plants and trees.

Narrator 2: That was day three.

Voice of God: Let there be lights in the sky. Let them separate the day from the night.

Chorus: And that's exactly what happened.

Narrator 1: God made the sun. He also made the moon and stars.

Narrator 2: That was day four.

Voice of God: Let the seas be filled with living things. Let birds fly above the earth across the sky.

Chorus: And that's exactly what happened.

Narrator 1: God created every kind of animal that lives in the seas. He created every kind of bird that flies.

Narrator 2: That was day five.

Voice of God: Let the land produce every kind of living creature.

Chorus: And that's exactly what happened.

Narrator 1: God made every kind of land animal.

Voice of God: Let us make human beings so that they are like us. Let them rule over all the animals.

Chorus: And that's exactly what happened.

Narrator 1: So God created human beings in his own likeness. He created them to be like himself.

Narrator 2: That was day six.

Narrator 1: After God made people he said it was VERY good. You and I are special creations of a very loving God. He is proud of you! He is happy he made you!





LESSON 1

MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

CHARACTER:

God

BIBLE BASIS:

Genesis 1

STORYBOOK BASIS:

Chapter 1, "God Will Make You Like Jesus"
in *God Always Keeps His Promises*

KEY VERSE:

Genesis 1:26a (ICB): Then God said, "Let us make
human beings in our image and likeness."

KEY IDEA:

God made me in his image.

Master Supply List

- photograph of one of the students
- hand mirror
- *God Always Keeps His Promises: Unshakable Hope for Kids* storybook
- Bibles (1 per student)
- clipboards
- paper
- pencils
- Family Page (1 per student)

Optional Supplies

You will need the following supplies based on which option(s) you choose in Step 3 | Explore More.

- **Option 1:** What Is God Like? worksheet (1 per student), pencils, Bibles, sticky notes (optional)
- **Option 2:** two Hula-Hoops™, sentence strips, marker, scissors
- **Option 3:** construction paper, pencils, crayons/colored pencils/markers, Child Outline template (3 or 4 copies), card stock, scissors, tape, chalkboard or whiteboard and chalk/marker
- **Option 4:** audiovisual equipment to play music or project a video
- **Option 5:** Psalm 139—Created by God reading (1 per student), pencils, highlighters

STEP 1 | Come Together (10 minutes)

Supplies: photograph of one of the students, hand mirror

Teacher Prep: Print a photograph of one of the students.

CREATE INTEREST

- INVITE the student in the photograph to stand in front of the group.
- HOLD UP the photograph next to the student.
- ASK (referring to the photo): Is this [student's name]? (*No, it's an image of that student.*)
- INQUIRE: How is the photo similar to [student]? How is it different? (*take responses*)
- STAND with your back to the group. Look at the students through the hand mirror. Call on a volunteer to stand in front of the group.
- ASK (referring to the reflection): Is this [student's name]? (*No, it's a reflection of that student.*)
- QUESTION: How is the reflection similar to [student]? How is it different? (*take responses*)
- SAY: God, who created the whole universe, created you. He created you in his own image. That means you are like God in some ways and different in some ways. Today, we'll learn what it means to be made in God's image.



KEY VERSE

- INTRODUCE this week's Key Verse. Repeat the verse slowly a few times, until the students are able to say the verse from memory.

Genesis 1:26a: Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image and likeness."

- COMMENT: One way we are like God is that we care for the world God made. God gave us a job to do. He gave us the job of taking caring of everything else he made.

PRAYER

- PRAY aloud with the students: God our Creator, you are perfect and loving and trustworthy. Please help us get to know you better so we can be more like you. Amen.

STEP 2 | Hear the Story (20 minutes)

Supplies: *God Always Keeps His Promises* storybook, Bibles, clipboards, paper, pencils

Teacher Prep: Give each student a Bible, clipboard with paper and a pencil.

INTRODUCTION

- DIRECT students to open their Bibles to Genesis 1.
- TELL students they will hear the account of creation from Genesis 1, the beginning of the Bible.
- SAY: Write numbers 1–6 on your paper. God made the entire universe in just six days. As I read, jot down what God did each day.

READ THE STORY

- READ aloud pages 9–14 of the *God Always Keeps His Promises* storybook.
- EMPHASIZE the day and read slowly what was created so students can take notes.
- REVIEW
- ASK: How many days of creation were there? (*six, followed by a day of rest*)
- REVIEW: What did God create on each day? (*1—light; 2—sky; 3—land, sea, plants; 4—sun, moon, stars; 5—fish, birds; 6—land animals, humans*)
- REREAD the section about the creation of people.
- ASK: Why does God say “us”? (*God is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*)



- CONSIDER: What else does this lesson teach us about what God is like? (*possibly: powerful, imaginative, loving*)
- ASK: What does it mean to be made in God's image? (*We are like God in some ways and different in other ways*)
- ASK: How are we like God? How are we different from God? (*possibly: alike—we can think, imagine, communicate, love; different—cannot create, mortal, limited power*)
- SAY: Being made in God's image makes you special. The Bible says God saw you before your body was ever formed. It says God knows every one of your days before it ever happens. He made you in his own image to do good works, such as showing God's love to others.

STEP 3 | Explore More

Choose from these activity options to help students explore the lesson further.

OPTION 1: WHAT IS GOD LIKE? (20 MINUTES)

Supplies: What Is God Like? worksheet (1 per student), pencils, Bibles, sticky notes (optional)

Teacher Prep: Print and photocopy the What Is God Like? worksheet.

- GIVE each student a What Is God Like? worksheet.
- INSTRUCT them to complete the worksheet alone or in pairs, providing assistance as needed.
- PROVIDE sticky notes, if needed, for students to use in solving the final unscramble (by writing one letter on each sticky note and rearranging). Point out that both God and people make promises, but God always keeps his promises.

Note: The answers are: (1) love, (2) same, (3) faithful, (4) spirit, (5) truth, (6) perfect, (7) holy, (8) promises.

OPTION 2: CHARACTERISTIC SORT (15 MINUTES)

Supplies: two Hula-Hoops, sentence strips, marker, scissors

Teacher Prep: Write the descriptors and three labels below on separate strips of paper. Set the Hula-Hoops and labels on the floor. Put the descriptors in a facedown pile.

- SAY: We are made in God's image, which means we are like God in some ways and different in other ways. Let's decide whether some characteristics describe God, people, or both.



- INSTRUCT students to copy the verse at the top of their paper.
- DISPLAY student work (with names hidden) under the heading “Made in God’s Image” in a place where others can enjoy it. Parents will have fun guessing which one is their child’s and then checking under the fold to see if they’re right!

OPTION 4: PRAISE AND WORSHIP (15 MINUTES)

Supplies: audiovisual equipment to play music or project a video

Recommended song: “Let Them See You” by JJ Weeks Band, © 2013 Johnny Ridgecrest Publishing

- **Potential sources:** This [YouTube link](#) and [CCLI # 6484471](#)
- **Purpose for this song:** This lovely song reminds students they are a reflection of God for others to see.

Recommended song: “Awesome God” by Rich Mullens, © 1988 Universal Music—Brentwood Benson Publishing

- **Potential sources:** This [YouTube link](#) and [CCLI # 41099](#)
- **Purpose for this song:** Children will celebrate God’s “wisdom, power and love” with this moving song.

OPTION 5: ACT IT OUT (20 MINUTES)

Supplies: Psalm 139—Created by God reading (1 per student), pencils, highlighters

Teacher Prep: Print and photocopy the Psalm 139—Created by God reading. The text is from the NIV translation.

- GIVE each student a copy of the Psalm 139—Created by God reading.
- EXPLAIN: These verses come from the book of Psalms in the Bible. A psalm is like a song or poem, and this one is about how amazing our Creator is.
- WORK together to decide how to present the passage aloud. Split it up into parts, reading different parts individually, in pairs, and all together.
- RECITE the passage aloud according to the parts you’ve decided on.
- ASK students what this reading tells us about God.



STEP 4 | Going Home (5 minutes)

Supplies: Family Page (1 per student)

Teacher Prep: Print and photocopy the Family Page.

- GIVE each student a copy of this week's Family Page.
- SAY: Give this page to your family when they pick you up. It will remind you to tell your family how you are made in God's image.
- INVITE students to practice telling you what they remember about Creation.
- REVIEW today's lesson and Key Idea as you wait for the students to get picked up.
- CHALLENGE students to practice saying today's Key Verse from memory.
- REMIND each student to take home any activity sheets or craft projects and the Family Page.





FAMILY PAGE | LESSON 1:
MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

CHARACTER:

God

BIBLE BASIS:

Genesis 1, as told in *God Always Keeps His Promises* storybook, Chapter 1

KEY VERSE:

Genesis 1:26a (ICB) Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image and likeness."

KEY IDEA:

God made me in his image.

How to Use This Page

This week, your family can read Chapter 1, "God Will Make You Like Jesus" in *God Always Keeps His Promises* to help your child remember the lesson. Use the *Table Talk* questions to start a discussion around the dinner table, while driving in the car, or just about anywhere. The *Living Faith* activity is designed to remind your child of the Bible lesson through a drama or other engaging activity. The *Extra Mile* idea provides interactive ways for your child to connect with the Bible.

TABLE TALK

1. What's one imaginary animal you wish God had created?
 2. What does it mean to be "made in God's image"?
 3. What three words do you think best describe God?
 4. What are some ways you are like God?
-

LIVING FAITH

Option 1

The account of creation in Genesis 1 is one of the most amazing parts of the Bible! Help your child envision these miraculous seven days by creating a diorama or poster perhaps to look like this:

In the beginning . . .	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7

Then, let your child’s imagination take over as he or she fills the scene with drawings, figures, pictures cut from magazines, or other props. Be sure to have a Bible on hand to refer to.

Option 2

Create a life-size drawing by tracing your child’s body on butcher paper. Help him or her decorate the figure using markers, scrap paper, fabric, yarn, and other craft supplies. When it’s done, add labels that call attention to your child’s special traits, such as a heart that cares about God’s world, feet that hurry to help others, and so on.

EXTRA MILE

- To understand more fully “the image of God,” get to know the character or nature of God. As a family, read the following passages from the Bible: Romans 11:33–36, Daniel 2:20–23, Acts 17:24–27.
- Where does Jesus fit in? As fully God and fully man, Jesus is unique. See what the Bible says about the nature of Jesus in 2 Corinthians 4:4, Colossians 1:15, and Hebrews 1:3.
- God created every person in his likeness. As a family, find a way to celebrate God’s love for every person by serving those who might be overlooked. Go sing for seniors at a nursing home, serve food to the hungry, or donate items to children in foster homes. Come up with a service project that works best for your family and your area.



Name _____ Date _____

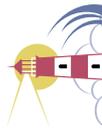
What Is God Like?

Look up each verse to help you unscramble the words.

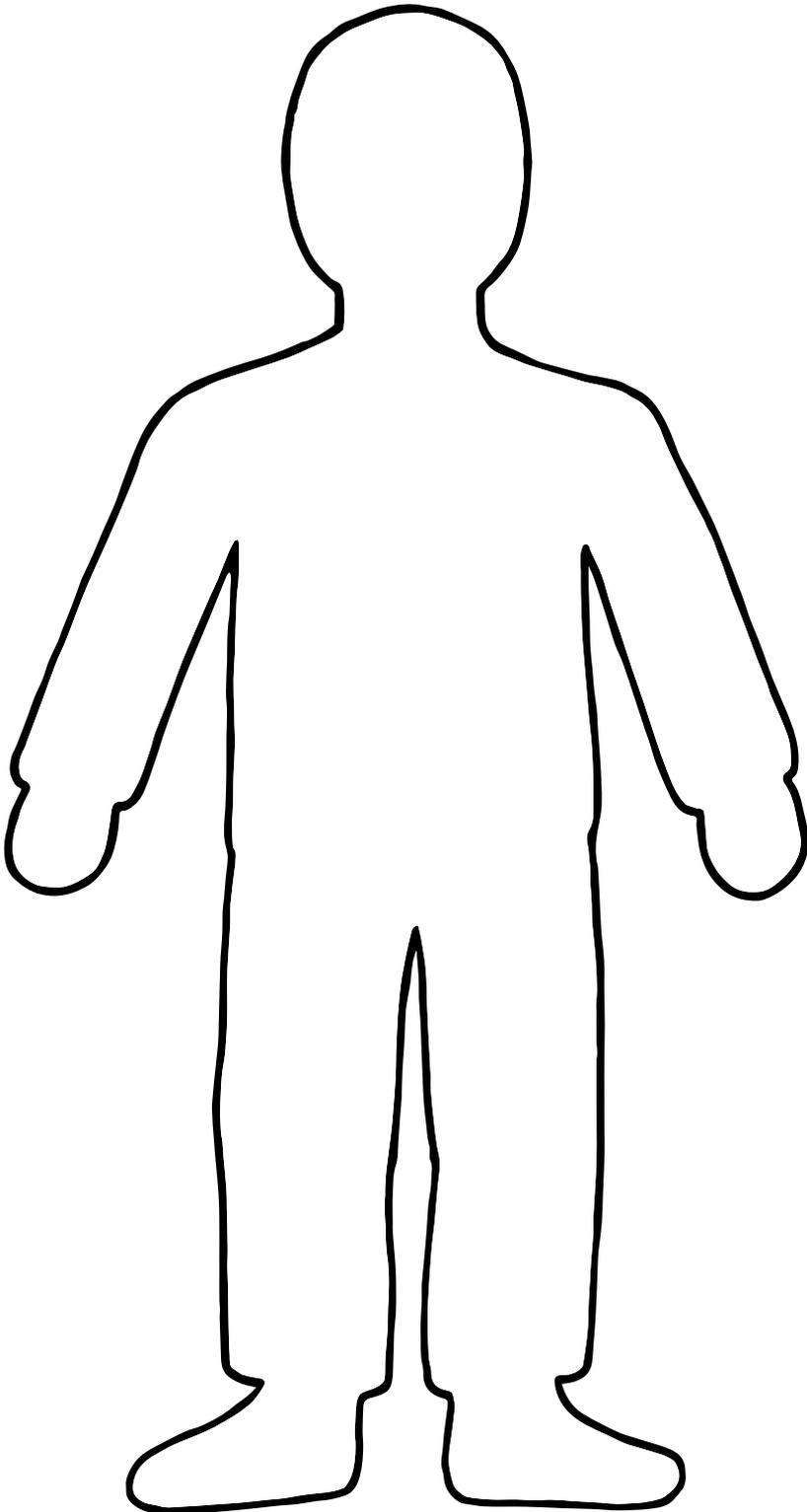
1. 1 John 4:8 God is **E L V O** _____
2. Hebrews 13:8 God is always the **E A M S** _____
3. 1 Corinthians 10:13 God is **L A F F I H U T** _____
4. John 4:24 God is **R S T I I P** _____
5. John 14:17 God is **U T T R H** _____
6. Matthew 5:48 God is **F E P T C E R** _____
7. Psalm 99:3 God is **Y H L O** _____

Unscramble the circled letters to finish the sentence.

8. We can always trust God's _____!



Child Outline





PSALM 139—CREATED BY GOD

¹LORD, you have seen what is in my heart.
You know all about me.

²You know when I sit down and when I get up.
You know what I'm thinking even though you are far away.

³You know when I go out to work and when I come back home.
You know exactly how I live.

⁴LORD, even before I speak a word,
you know all about it.

⁵You are all around me, behind me and in front of me.
You hold me safe in your hand.

⁶I'm amazed at how well you know me.
It's more than I can understand.

¹³You created the deepest parts of my being.
You put me together inside my mother's body.

¹⁴How you made me is amazing and wonderful.
I praise you for that.
What you have done is wonderful.
I know that very well.

¹⁵None of my bones was hidden from you
when you made me inside my mother's body.
That place was as dark as the deepest parts of the earth.
When you were putting me together there,

¹⁶your eyes saw my body even before it was formed.
You planned how many days I would live.
You wrote down the number of them in your book
before I had lived through even one of them.

¹⁷God, your thoughts about me are priceless.
No one can possibly add them all up.

¹⁸If I could count them,
they would be more than the grains of sand.
If I were to fall asleep counting and then wake up,
you would still be there with me.

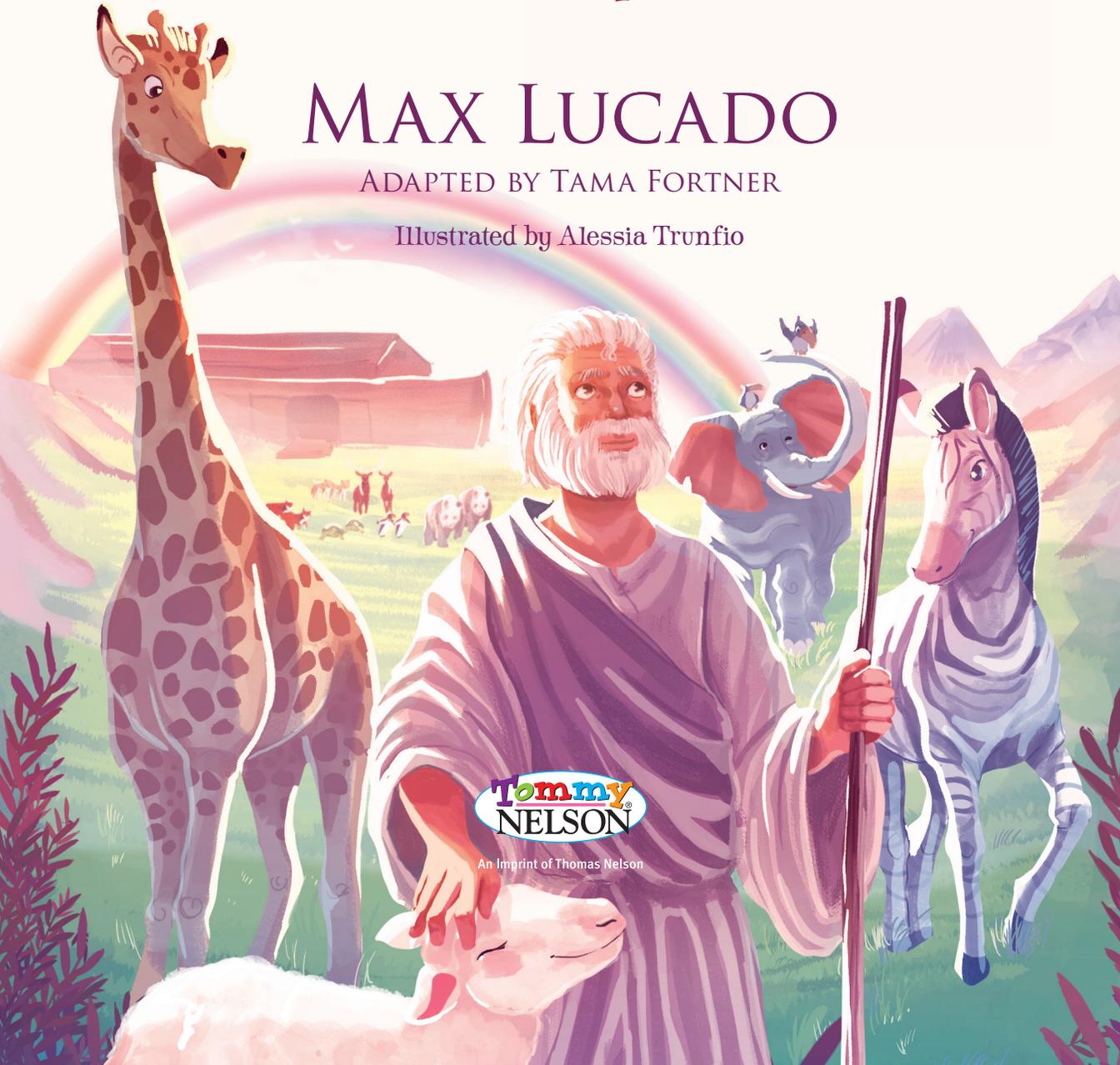
God Always Keeps His Promises

Unshakable Hope for Kids

MAX LUCADO

ADAPTED BY TAMA FORTNER

Illustrated by Alessia Trunfio



Tommy
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God Always Keeps His Promises

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Denalyn and I happily dedicate this book to our grandson
Max Wesley Bishop
May you build your life on the promises of God.



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A Letter to Parents

“I promise.” We hear those words early and often in life.

“I’ll be home early. I promise.”

“We’ll play next weekend. I promise.”

“You can visit me this summer. I promise.”

People make promises. And for the most part, people intend to keep their promises. But we are not on this earth for long before we learn that not everyone can. Not everyone does. Promises get broken. And consequently, hearts get broken. We tend to grow cynical, distrustful, and jaded. We wonder, *Does anyone keep their word?*

God does. The Bible contains well over seven thousand promises. God is a promise maker, and God is a promise keeper. If He says it, we can believe it.

Your children need to know this. No one, including the child you love, will get through life pain-free. We all feel the sting of a broken promise. So teach them to trust in God’s Word. Acquaint them with His great and powerful promises. Urge them not to stand on the pain in life or the problems of life but to stand on the great and precious promises of God.

They’ll be glad you did. I promise.

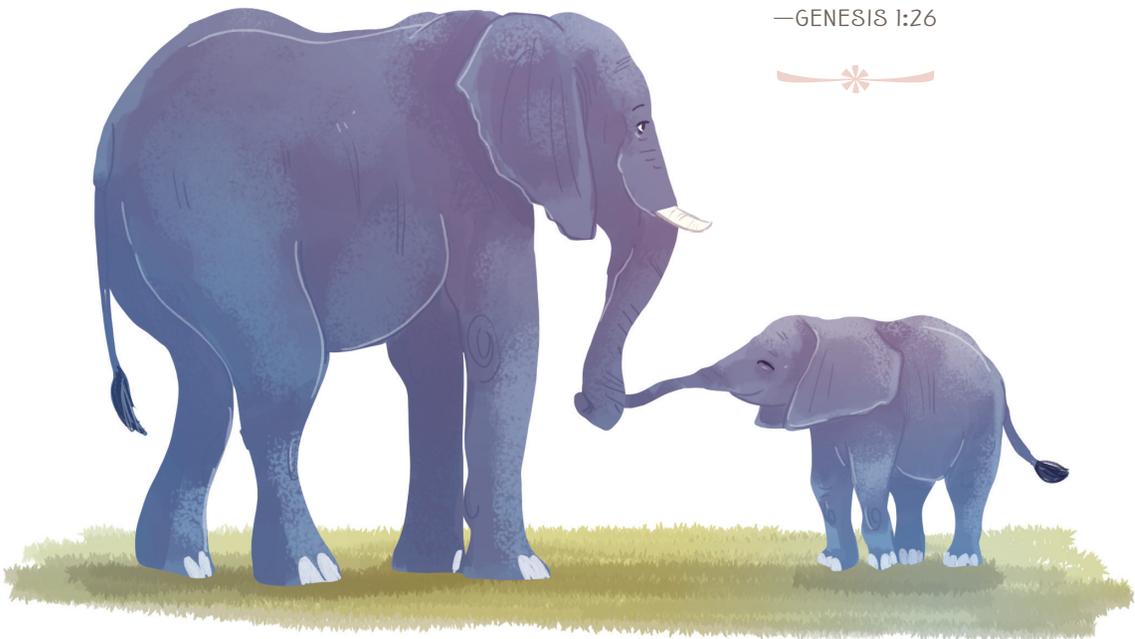
—Max Lucado

God Will Make You Like Jesus

—*—
God said, “Let
us make human
beings in our
image and
likeness.”

—GENESIS 1:26

—*—



Has anyone ever said you “take after” your mom or your dad? “Take after” means that you look like someone else. For example, you might have your mom’s eyes, your dad’s ears, or your great-uncle Alfred’s freckled nose and flaming red hair!

There’s Someone else you “take after” too. *God*. That’s because you are created in His image. He made you to be like Him. Not to be a god, but to be a *child of God* who loves and gives and helps like Him. He even sent His Son, Jesus, to show you how. And each day, God works to make you just a little bit more like His perfect Son.

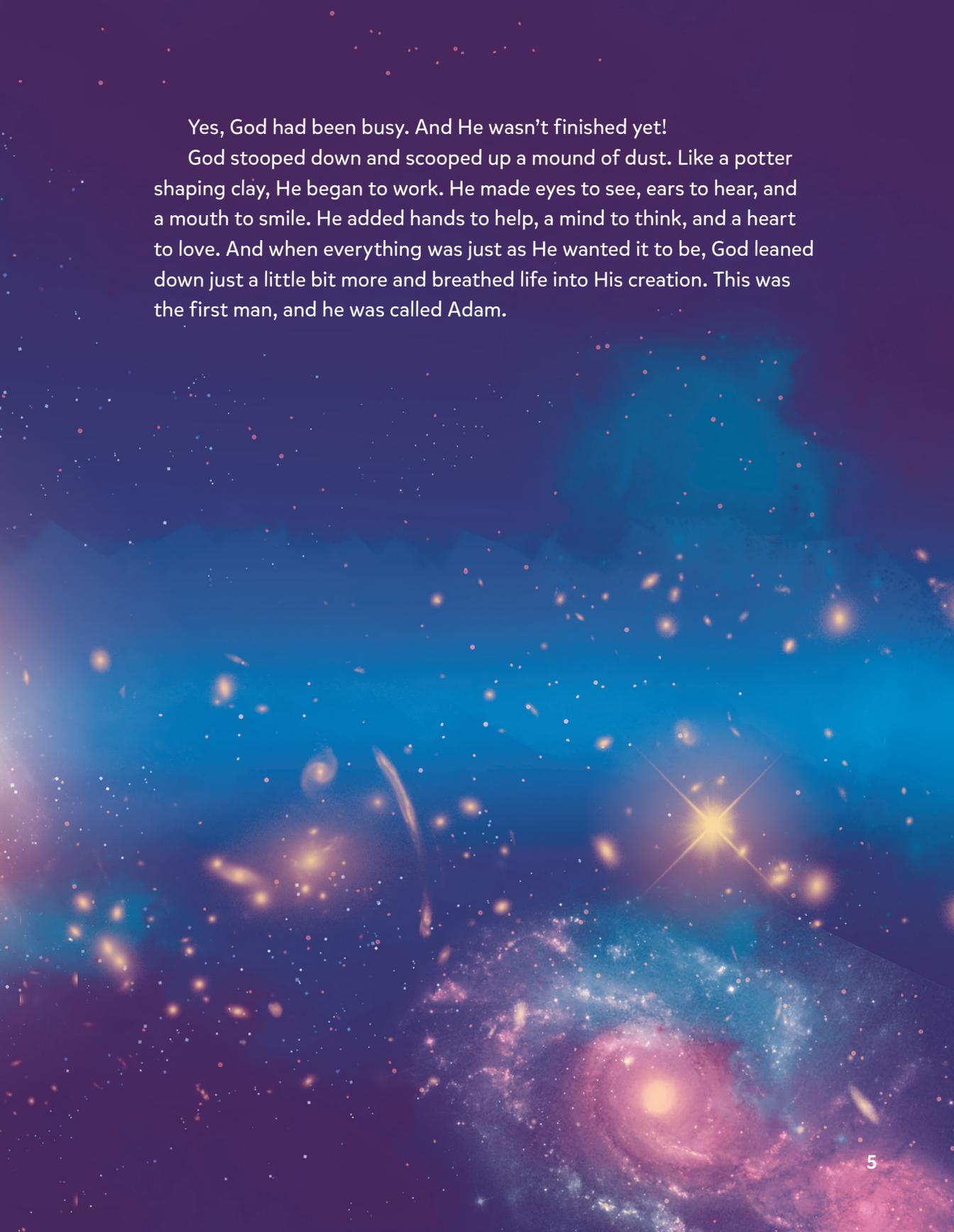
Out of all the amazing things God created, only people were made in His image. Not the oceans, not the birds, not the chimpanzees. Only people were made in God’s image.

So if you ever wonder who you really are, remember this wonderful promise: you are made in the image of God. You are His idea. His child. You “take after” Him. And as you learn to love Him, He’ll make you more and more like His Son.

from Genesis 1-2

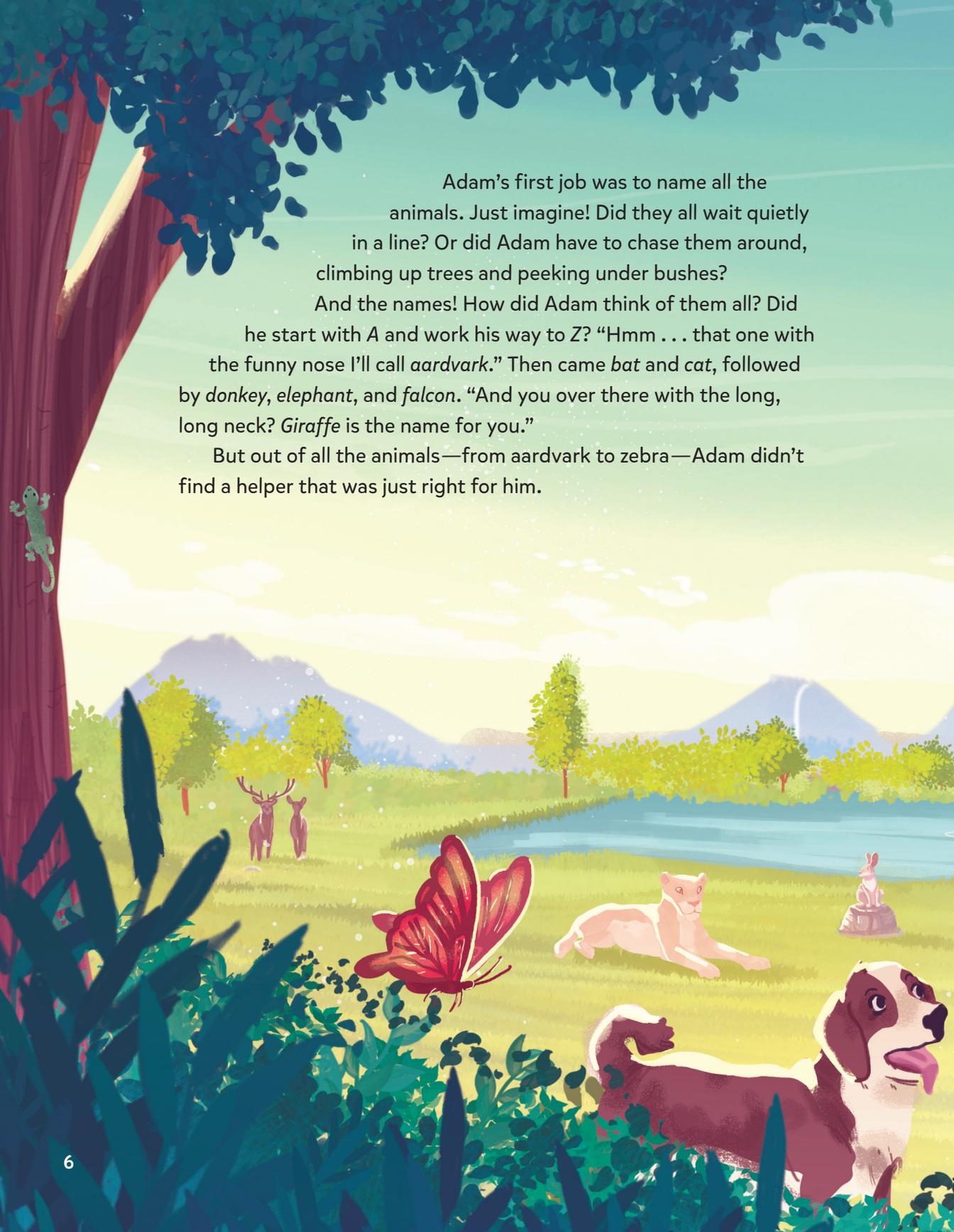
God had had a busy week.

He had taken a whole lot of nothing and created . . . well . . . a whole lot of everything. And with just a few words! He spoke, and light shot across the skies. Oceans and mountains, rivers and seas, plants and trees—all were created when He spoke. At God's command, eagles soared, whales sang, and lions roared.



Yes, God had been busy. And He wasn't finished yet!

God stooped down and scooped up a mound of dust. Like a potter shaping clay, He began to work. He made eyes to see, ears to hear, and a mouth to smile. He added hands to help, a mind to think, and a heart to love. And when everything was just as He wanted it to be, God leaned down just a little bit more and breathed life into His creation. This was the first man, and he was called Adam.



Adam's first job was to name all the animals. Just imagine! Did they all wait quietly in a line? Or did Adam have to chase them around, climbing up trees and peeking under bushes?

And the names! How did Adam think of them all? Did he start with A and work his way to Z? "Hmm . . . that one with the funny nose I'll call *aardvark*." Then came *bat* and *cat*, followed by *donkey*, *elephant*, and *falcon*. "And you over there with the long, long neck? *Giraffe* is the name for you."

But out of all the animals—from aardvark to zebra—Adam didn't find a helper that was just right for him.

So God made Adam fall into a deep, deep sleep. He took one of Adam's ribs and used it to make one last creation: woman. God brought her to Adam, and she was called Eve.

Adam and Eve were unlike anything else God had made. They were created in His image, to be like Him. To give, to help, and to love like Him.



Do you ever feel small? Or not very important? It happens sometimes—when other kids make fun of you, when you're different, or when you mess up or make a mistake. If you ever find yourself wondering who you are or if you really matter, remember this beautiful promise from God: you are His child, made in His image, and you are worth everything to Him.

Of course, you aren't perfect! But God promises to keep working on you, every day making you just a little bit more like His perfect Son, Jesus. A little more loving, a little more giving, a little kinder too.

And that promise isn't just for you. Every person is God's beloved creation—no matter who they are, where they live, or what they have or do. So if you ever get angry or upset with someone, remember that God is working on that person too.

Everywhere you go and in everything you do, remember God's promise to you. You are His child. His idea. Created in His image. And . . .

He will make you more like Jesus.

MY PROMISE TO GOD

I will trust God to teach me
to be more like Jesus.



Dear God, when this world tells me I'm nobody important, remind me that I am Your child—very loved and very important to You! Amen.

Lord, you are our father. We are like clay, and you are the potter. Your hands made us all.

—ISAIAH 64:8



You have begun to live the new life. In your new life you are being made new. You are becoming like the One who made you. This new life brings you the true knowledge of God.

—COLOSSIANS 3:10



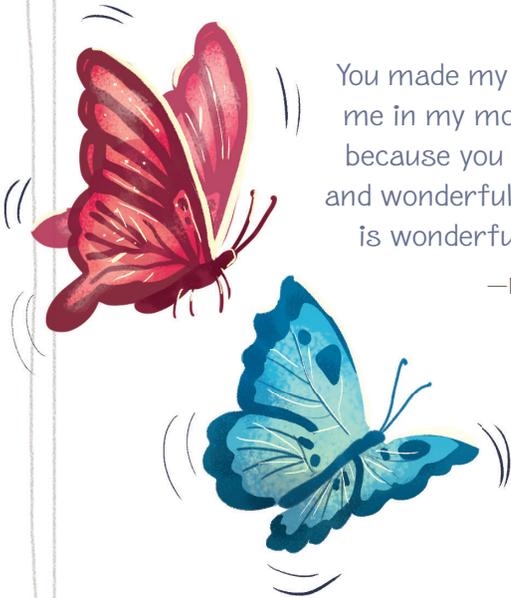
You made me and formed me with your hands. Give me understanding so I can learn your commands.

—PSALM 119:73



You made my whole being. You formed me in my mother's body. I praise you because you made me in an amazing and wonderful way. What you have done is wonderful. I know this very well.

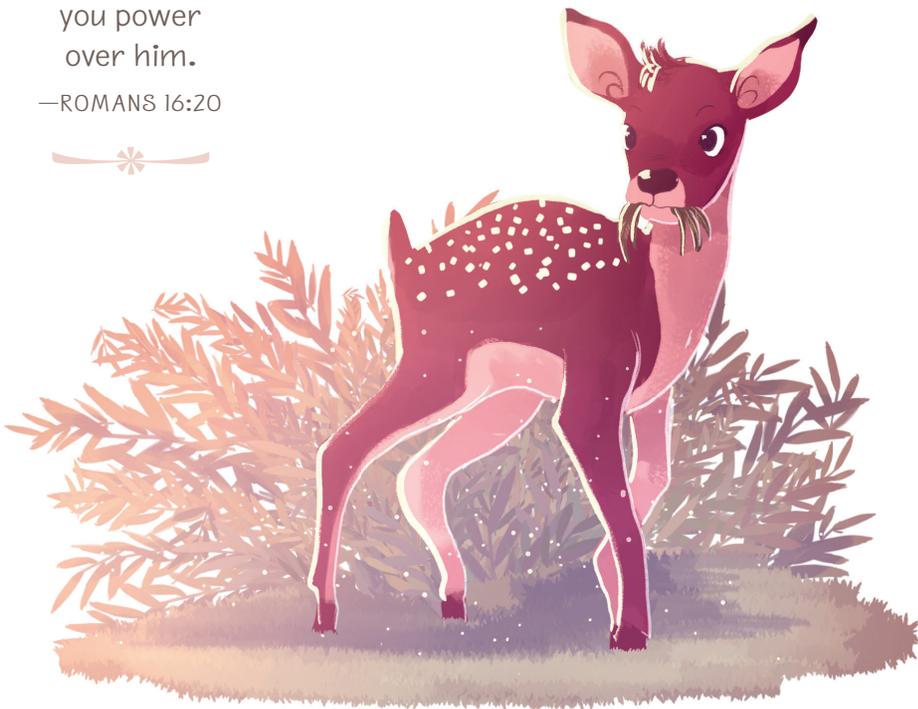
—PSALM 139:13-14



God Will Win the Battle

— ✧ —
The God who
brings peace
will soon defeat
Satan and give
you power
over him.

—ROMANS 16:20



Do some days feel like you're fighting a battle? You try to do what's right, but it's just so hard! It's like there's someone fighting against you, trying to trick you into doing things you know you shouldn't do—like snatching that game from your sister or fibbing to your mom to get out of trouble.

Well . . . someone *is* out to trick you. His name is Satan, but he goes by some other names too. Like “Devil” and “father of lies.” He's the ultimate villain, the crookedest crook, and the baddest of bad guys. And he's only got one mission in mind: to make God's children lose in their battle to do what's right.

But God gives you a promise for this fight: in the end, it's the Devil who will lose. No, that doesn't stop him from fighting. After all, the Devil has been at it a really long time—since Adam and Eve. But always remember this: the days may be tough and the fight may be terrible, but God will win.

from Genesis 3

It was a beautiful day in the garden. Adam and Eve wandered among the trees. They nibbled on berries and scratched the elephant behind its ear.

God had given them a fresh, new world. And everything in it was good.

Except the snake.

Of course, this was no ordinary snake. This was that sneaky old Devil himself.

He hid in the trees and waited to spring his trap. When Eve passed by, he called out, “Did God *really* say you can’t eat *any* fruit from *any* tree?”



“No, we can eat any fruit,” Eve said, “except fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden. If we even touch that fruit, we’ll die!”

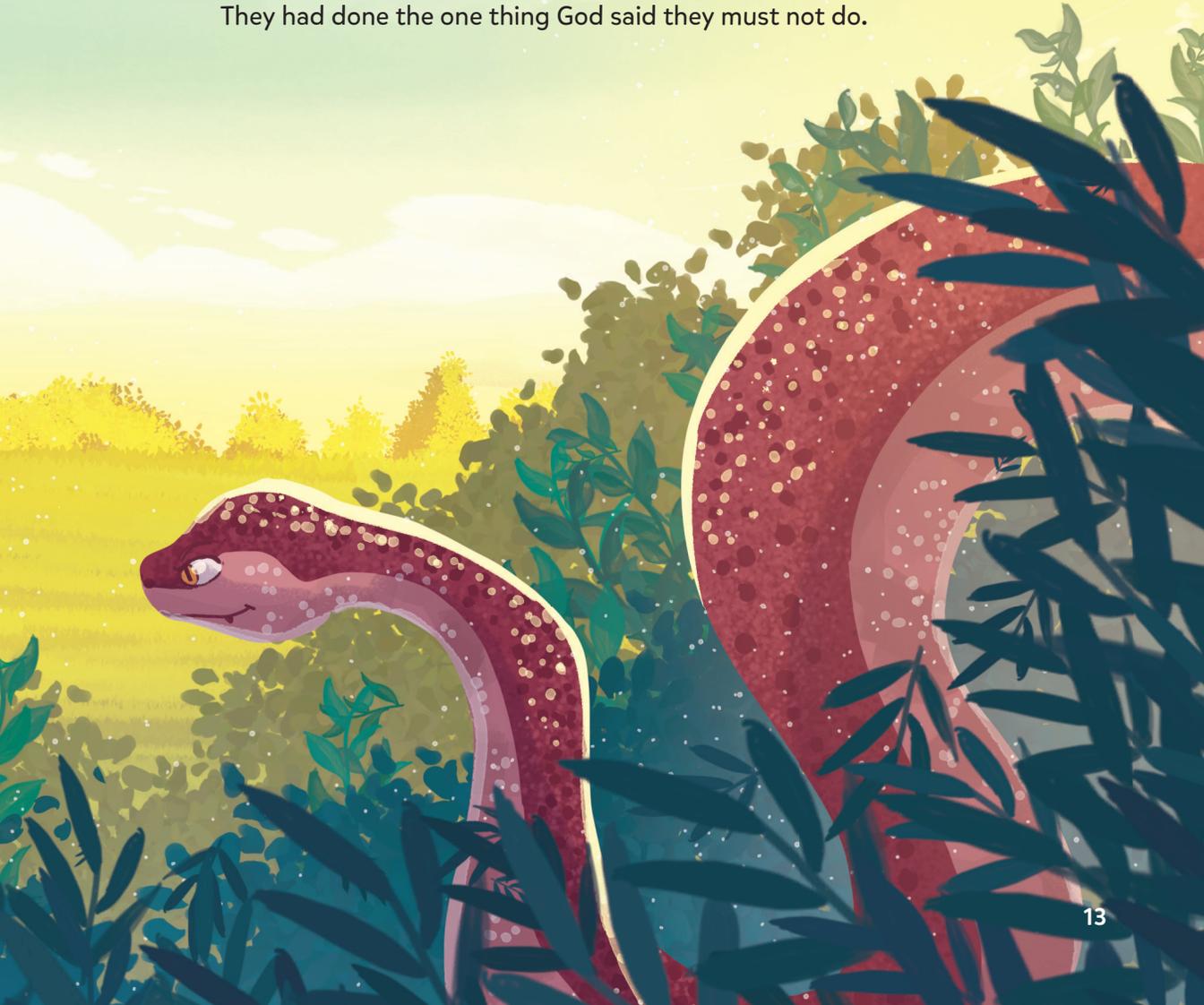
(Actually, God didn’t say they couldn’t even *touch* it, but Eve wasn’t taking any chances!)

“You won’t die,” the snake hissed out a lie. “It’ll make you as wise as God. God just doesn’t want you to be as smart as He is.”

Eve looked at the snake and then at the fruit. It *did* look delicious. And she wouldn’t mind being as wise as God.

So she picked a piece. She sniffed it, and her mouth watered. Then she closed her eyes and took a bite. Still chewing, she gave it to Adam, and he took a bite too.

They had done the one thing God said they must not do.



At once, everything changed. There was definitely a chill in the air. Adam and Eve suddenly saw that they were naked! Snatching up fig leaves, they quickly started sewing. Just as they were putting the finishing touches on their leafy new wardrobe, they heard something. Or rather, Someone. *God!* He was walking in the garden.

Adam and Eve ran to hide.

“Adam?” God called. “Where are you?”

Adam gulped. “I was afraid because I’m naked,” he said, “so I hid.”

“Who told you that you were naked?” God asked. “Did you eat the fruit I told you not to eat?”



Of course, God already knew the answer. He also knew that sneaky Satan had tempted them to do it. Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the snake. But God punished them all. From that day forward, sin, sickness, and even death came into the world. And Satan would forever be the Enemy of God's people.

But something else happened that day too. God gave His people a promise: The Devil will lose. No matter how much he lies or how hard he fights. God—and those who trust in Him—will win.



You may not know this, but you're a soldier. And every day you fight in a battle. It's a battle between good and evil.

The thing about battles is that it's important to know who your enemy is. To know what he wants and how he fights. Your Enemy is the Devil. His weapons are lies and tricks and temptations. He makes good things look bad and bad things look good. And he wants you to think you are all alone in this fight, that God isn't there for you, that He isn't even real. But that is a lie!

The truth is that God never leaves you to fight this battle alone. He fights right beside you. And He gives you a special armor too—the armor of His promises. One of those promises is about how the battle will end: the Devil is going to lose.

God will win the battle.

MY PROMISE TO GOD

Though the Devil will try to trick
and trap me, I will trust God
to fight for me—and win!



Dear God, I know the Devil is real, but I also know You are bigger and stronger than he is. I will trust You to fight for me. Amen.

My dear children, you belong to God. So you have defeated them because God's Spirit, who is in you, is greater than the devil, who is in the world.

—1 JOHN 4:4



Give yourselves to God. Stand against the devil, and the devil will run away from you.

—JAMES 4:7



Our fight is not against people on earth. We are fighting against the rulers and authorities and the powers of this world's darkness. We are fighting against the spiritual powers of evil in the heavenly world.

—EPHESIANS 6:12



NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

MAX LUCADO

UNSHAKABLE
HOPE

STUDENT EDITION



P R O M I S E
B O O K

TO:

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UNSHAKABLE HOPE

PROMISE BOOK

STUDENT EDITION



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Denalyn and I proudly dedicate this
volume to Maxine Nadeau—celebrating
her tireless devotion to students

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NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

What's shaking your world right now? Your future? Your faith? Maybe it's your family or your friendships. Does it sometimes feel as if it's everything all at once?

If you could use some unshakable hope, I've got good news: God's promises are bigger than any problem you'll ever face.

After a few decades of following Jesus, I've discovered that nothing gives me more hope than God's promises. Our mighty and loving God governs the world according to his promises. In this book I've included thirty of my favorite go-to promises. Throughout the years I've turned to these promises to encourage others—and to encourage myself. You and I desperately need them.

Just as the doctor might prescribe a medication for your body, God has given promises for your heart. These are meant to help you cope with your problems, fears, and questions. They will set your mind at ease and remind you that God has everything under control.

UNSHAKABLE HOPE PROMISE BOOK

God's promises will also remind you that you aren't alone. I know it can feel like you are at times. But God is with you, and he loves you more than you can imagine.

In a shaky world, that's the best promise of all: you can find unshakable hope in the God who promises always to love you and never leave you.

MAX LUCADO



GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES

[God] has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature.

—2 PETER 1:4

If you believe in the promises of God, you're in good company. The heroes in the Bible were all ages and came from all cultures. Some of them were rich and others were poor. Yet they had one thing in common: they built their lives on the promises of God.

Because of God's promises, Noah believed in rain before a single drop had ever fallen on earth. Because of God's promises, Abraham left a good home for one he'd never seen. Because of God's promises, Joshua led two million people into the promised land. Because of God's promises, David conked a giant, Peter rebounded from regret, and Paul found a grace worth dying for.

God's promises were guiding truths in their journeys of faith—and they had plenty of promises to pick from. One student of the Bible spent a year and a half attempting to count the number of promises God made to humanity. He came up with 7,487 promises!¹

Not only is God a promise maker; God is a promise keeper. From Genesis 1, the Bible makes the case that we can depend on

God. Nine times the text repeats “God said.” And without exception, when God spoke, something wonderful happened. By divine order, he made light, land, beaches, and creatures. God didn't discuss it with any advisors. He needed no help. He spoke, and it happened. We're left with one conclusion:

God's word is guaranteed. What he says happens.

Faith is the deeply held belief that God will keep his promises. God will not—he cannot—break his promises. What he says will happen.

**FAITH IS THE
DEEPLY HELD
BELIEF THAT GOD
WILL KEEP HIS
PROMISES.**

It must happen! God's promises are irrevocable because of who he is:

- **God is unchanging.** He sees the end from the beginning. He's never caught off guard or surprised. He makes no course corrections. He is not swayed by up-and-down moods. "He never changes" (James 1:17 NLT).
- **God is faithful.** "God can be trusted to keep his promise" (Hebrews 10:23 NLT).
- **God is strong.** He does not overpromise and underdeliver. "God is able to do whatever he promises" (Romans 4:21 NLT).
- **God cannot lie.** "It is impossible for God to lie" (Hebrews 6:18 NLT). A rock cannot swim. A hippo cannot fly. A butterfly cannot eat a bowl of spaghetti. You cannot sleep on a cloud, and God cannot lie. He never exaggerates, manipulates, fibs, or flatters. "He doesn't break promises!" (Titus 1:2 THE MESSAGE).

The question is not whether God keeps his promises. The question is, will you build your life upon them?



GOD'S PROMISES FOR YOU

The LORD said: "I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the LORD, will do for you."

EXODUS 34:10

UNSHAKABLE HOPE PROMISE BOOK

“As the rain and snow come down from heaven and stay upon the ground to water the earth, and cause the grain to grow and to produce seed for the farmer and bread for the hungry, so also is my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It shall accomplish all I want it to and prosper everywhere I send it.”

ISAIAH 55:10-11 TLB

The promise is targeted to you and your children, but also to all who are far away—whomever, in fact, our Master God invites.

ACTS 2:39 THE MESSAGE

God is able to do whatever he promises.

ROMANS 4:21 NLT

No matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:20

Let’s keep a firm grip on the promises that keep us going. He always keeps his word.

HEBREWS 10:23 THE MESSAGE

The Lord is not slow in doing what he promised—the way some people understand slowness. But God is being patient with you. He does not want anyone to be lost, but he wants all people to change their hearts and lives.

2 PETER 3:9 NCV

THINK AND RESPOND

This chapter defined faith as “the deeply held belief that God will keep his promises.” Right now in your life is it easy to believe that God will keep his promises? Or is it difficult? Why?

Which characteristics of God, some of which were mentioned in this chapter, do you need to be reminded of in your current circumstances?

Describe a time in your life when nothing seemed to be going right but God gave you hope.

Write a Bible verse from this chapter that will help you remember that God is a promise maker and a promise keeper.



MY PROMISE TO GOD

I will build my life on God's promises. In a shaky world, I will trust God's unshakable Word. Rather than focusing on my circumstances and problems, I will place my hope in God and his promises.



YOU CAN KNOW GOD

“All people will know me.”

—HEBREWS 8:11 NCV

God guarantees a day when all people who want to know him will do so. Even now, God is revealing himself, inviting us to take a glimpse. We can know more than simple facts about him; we can know his heart, his joy, his passion, his plan, and his sorrows. God wants us to know *him*.

Some years ago my wife and I had a wilderness adventure in the Rocky Mountains . . . well, it was really more like a five-mile hike on a well-paved trail. Carrying a backpack filled with peanut butter sandwiches and two jugs of water, we trekked through pine trees and mountain rocks. By the time we got to the breathtaking waterfalls, we were out of breath. A sign invited hikers to keep going, but we were worn out. We didn't camp out. We didn't see wild animals. We didn't even build a campfire. Instead, we walked back to civilization to get sandwiches from the local deli. Such was the extent of my mountain-climbing experience!

As soon as I got off the trail, I did what you might expect: I ordered business cards with my new title—Max Lucado, Mountain Man. I got an office, hung a Wilderness Expert sign on the door, and offered my wisdom to anyone who needed it.

Would you hire me as an adventure guide? Of course not! You'd laugh at me, report me, or maybe try to correct me, but you wouldn't ask me for advice. After all, I didn't even make it all the way up the mountain!

When it comes to knowledge of God, we can't claim to be experts. Our finest thoughts are first grade math to his advanced algebra. We will never know everything about him. God is beyond our biggest thoughts, but that shouldn't discourage us. Once we are in heaven, we will enjoy an eternal adventure of discovery. We'll never stop learning about God and how amazing he is.

But we don't have to wait that long; we can begin now. In fact, the mark of a person who loves God is that he or she is always growing in the knowledge of God. "Don't let the rich brag of their riches. If you brag, brag of this and this only: That you understand and know me" (Jeremiah 9:23–24 THE MESSAGE).

**WE CAN KNOW
GOD. HE HAS NOT
HIDDEN HIMSELF
FROM US.**

The facts lead to a wonderful conclusion: we can know God. He has not hidden himself from us. He doesn't close the door on his children. He doesn't refuse our questions. He promises to make himself known to all who search for him.



GOD'S PROMISES FOR YOU

The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the skies announce what his hands have made.
Day after day they tell the story;
night after night they tell it again.
They have no speech or words;
they have no voice to be heard.
But their message goes out through all the world;
their words go everywhere on earth.

PSALM 19:1–4 NCV

Wise men and women are always learning,
always listening for fresh insights.

PROVERBS 18:15 THE MESSAGE

UNSHAKABLE HOPE PROMISE BOOK

“I’ll show you how great I am, how holy I am. I’ll make myself known all over the world. Then you’ll realize that I am God.”

EZEKIEL 38:23 THE MESSAGE

What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

ROMANS 1:19-20

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge
of God!

How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond
tracing out!

“Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counselor?”

“Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay them?”

For from him and through him and for him are all things.

To him be the glory forever! Amen.

ROMANS 11:33-36

THINK AND RESPOND

How does knowing more about God help you understand more about your life?

Do you feel you know mostly facts about God or that you know him personally? What are some ways you can get to know God more this week?

What questions do you look forward to asking God one day?

List several things you've learned about God that you think are amazing, and share why these things mean so much to you.



MY PROMISE TO GOD

I will make knowing God my main goal. Rather than just study facts about God, I will spend time with God himself. Through reading the Bible and spending time with him in prayer, I will begin the adventure of knowing God personally.



MAX LUCADO
AND ANDREA LUCADO

PRAYING THE
PROMISES



ANCHOR
YOUR LIFE TO
UNSHAKABLE
HOPE

TO:

FROM:

DATE:



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PRAYING THE PROMISES

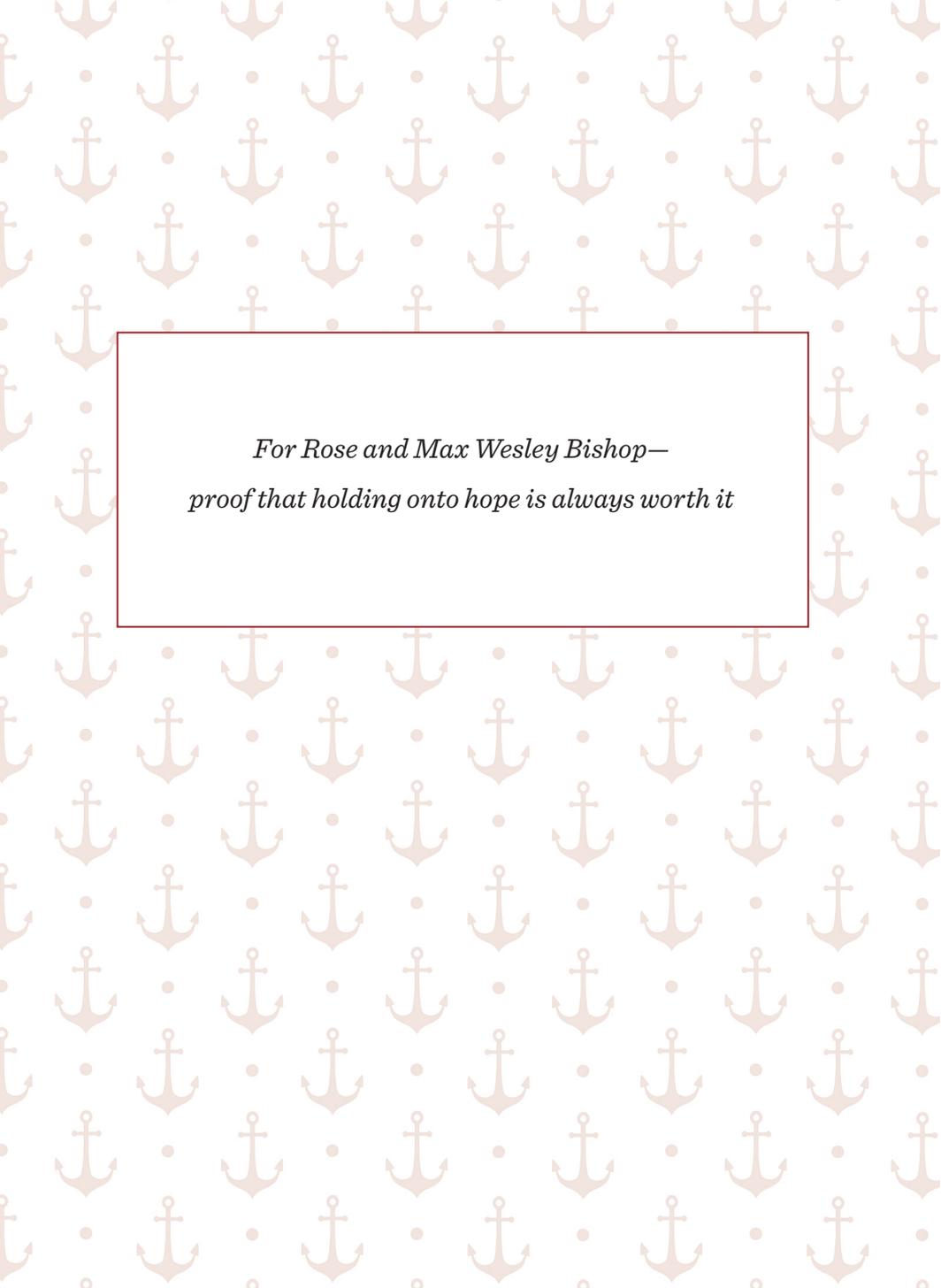
ANCHOR YOUR LIFE TO UNSHAKABLE HOPE



MAX LUCADO
& ANDREA LUCADO



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798



*For Rose and Max Wesley Bishop—
proof that holding onto hope is always worth it*



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Introduction

[Abraham] didn't tiptoe around God's promise asking cautiously skeptical questions. He plunged into the promise and came up strong, ready for God, sure that God would make good on what he had said.

—ROMANS 4:20–21 THE MESSAGE

What is shaking your world? Possibly your future, your faith, your family, or your finances. It's a shaky world out there.

Could you use some unshakable hope?

If so, you are not alone. We live in a day of despair. Many people believe this world is as good as it gets, and let's face it. It's not that good.

But as people who believe God's promises, we have an advantage. We can determine to ponder, proclaim, and pray the promises of God. We can be like Abraham, who “didn't tiptoe around God's promise asking cautiously skeptical questions. He plunged into the promise and came up strong” (Romans 4:20 THE MESSAGE). We can choose to filter life through the promises of God.

PRAYING THE PROMISES

For every problem in life, God has given us a promise. When struggles threaten, we can find hope by praying those promises.

- I'm feeling fearful today. Time for me to pray Judges 6:12: "The LORD is with you . . ." I will lay claim to the nearness of God.
- The world feels out of control. Time for a dose of Romans 8:28: "All things work together for good."
- I see dark clouds on the horizon. What was it Jesus told me? Oh, now I remember: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33 NIV).

After forty years of ministry, I've discovered that nothing lifts the weary soul like the promises of God. This book contains some of my favorites. Many of them are go-to promises I've turned to throughout the years to encourage others—and to encourage myself. We desperately need them. We do not need more opinions or hunches; we need the definitive declarations of our mighty and loving God. He governs the world according to these great and precious promises.

Let's be who we were made to be: People of the Promise. Let's keep these promises handy. Pray them out loud. Fill our lungs with air and hearts with hope and declare our belief in God's goodness.

*God Has Made a
Covenant with You*

*[God] has given us his very
great and precious promises,
so that through them you may
participate in the divine nature.*

—2 PETER 1:4, NIV

UNSHAKABLE HOPE

The heroes in the Bible came from all walks of life: rulers, servants, teachers, doctors. They were male, female, single, and married. Yet one common denominator united them: they built their lives on the promises of God. Because of God's promises, Noah believed in rain before *rain* was a word. Because of God's promises, Abraham left a good home for one he'd never seen. Because of God's promises, Joshua led two million people into enemy territory. Because of God's promises, David conked a giant, Peter rose from the ashes of regret, and Paul found a grace worth dying for.

One writer went so far as to call such saints "the heirs of promise" (Hebrews 6:17). It is as if the promise was the family fortune, and they were smart enough to attend the reading of the will. Jacob trusted God's promises. Joseph trusted God's promises. Moses trusted God's promises. Their stories were different, but the theme was the same: God's promises were polestars in their pilgrimages of faith. They had plenty of promises from which to pick.

One student of Scripture spent a year and a half attempting to tally the number of promises God made to humanity. He came up with 7,487 promises!¹ God's promises are pine trees in the Rocky Mountains of Scripture: abundant, unbending, and perennial. Some of the promises are positive, the assurance of blessings. Some are negative, the guarantee of consequences. But all are binding, for not only is God a promise maker; God is a promise keeper.

PROMISES FROM GOD

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he puts the deep into storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

—PSALM 33:6–9 NIV

“As the rain and snow come down from heaven and stay upon the ground to water the earth, and cause the grain to grow and to produce seed for the farmer and bread for the hungry, so also is my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It shall accomplish all I want it to and prosper everywhere I send it.”

—ISAIAH 55:10–11 TLB

God is able to do whatever he promises.

—ROMANS 4:21 NLT

No matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God.

—2 CORINTHIANS 1:20 NIV

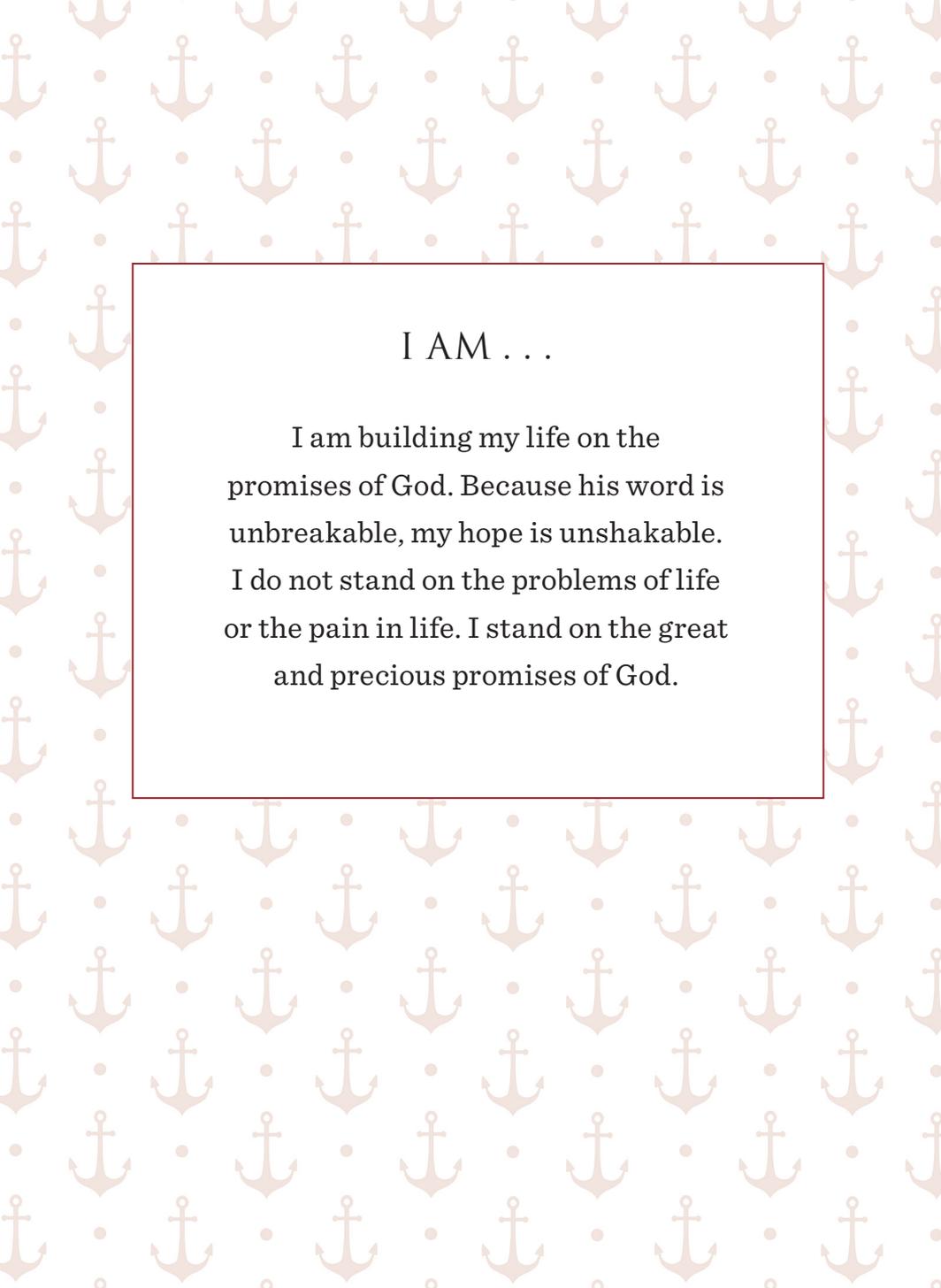
PRAYING GOD'S PROMISES

Lord, you are the maker and keeper of promises. Your Word does not return void. When you say you will do something, you do it. You are able to do whatever you promise. So many years ago you made a covenant with your people, and you have been faithful to that covenant.

Sometimes it is easier to put my faith in my circumstances rather than in your promises. I want to rely on myself, my earthly possessions, and the people in my life, but these so often fail me. But your promises will never fail me!

As I read through your promises, give me a new passion for them. Show me what promises I have forgotten over the years and need to cling to again. Reveal your true character to me. Remind me of the power of your love and your grace. Strengthen my faith, and teach me to lean on your Word rather than on myself.

Thank you for keeping your promises. I'm grateful for the ultimate promise I have in your Son, Jesus. Amen.

The background of the entire page is a repeating pattern of light brown anchors and small dots. The anchors are arranged in a grid, with a small dot centered between each anchor. The text is contained within a white rectangular box with a thin red border.

I AM . . .

I am building my life on the promises of God. Because his word is unbreakable, my hope is unshakable. I do not stand on the problems of life or the pain in life. I stand on the great and precious promises of God.

You Will Know God

No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, “Know the Lord,” because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.

—HEBREWS 8:11 NIV

UNSHAKABLE HOPE

Everything in creation gives evidence of God's existence. The intricacy of snowflakes, the roar of a thunderstorm, the precision of a honeybee, the bubbling of a cool mountain stream. These miracles and a million more give testimony to the existence of a brilliant, wise, and tireless God (Psalm 19:1–4). Everything shows evidence of a purposeful design. The facts lead to a wonderful conclusion. God is . . . and God is knowable.

He has not hidden himself. He doesn't close the door to his children. He does not resist our questions or refuse our inquiries, but rather the opposite: he promises success to all who search for him. Paul said in Romans, "Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made" (Romans 1:20).

We can know more than simple facts about our Creator; we can know his heart, his joy, his passion, his plan, and his sorrows. We can know God. Of course, we will never know him entirely. God is knowable, but he is incomprehensible (Isaiah 55:8–9). Our pursuit of him must be marked by humility. We will never know everything about God. He is to us what the Grand Canyon is to the explorer: an endless array of discovery and beauty.

But that isn't meant to discourage us. The mark of a saint is that he or she is *growing* in the knowledge of God. As saints, our highest pursuit is the pursuit of our Maker. So stand firmly upon God's promise. He will make himself known to all who seek him.

PROMISES FROM GOD

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge.

—PSALM 19:1–2

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

—ISAIAH 55:8–9

“Let not the wise boast in their wisdom, nor the mighty in their strength, nor the rich in their wealth. Whoever boasts must boast in this: that he understands and knows Me.”

—JEREMIAH 9:23–24 THE VOICE

What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

—ROMANS 1:19–20 NIV

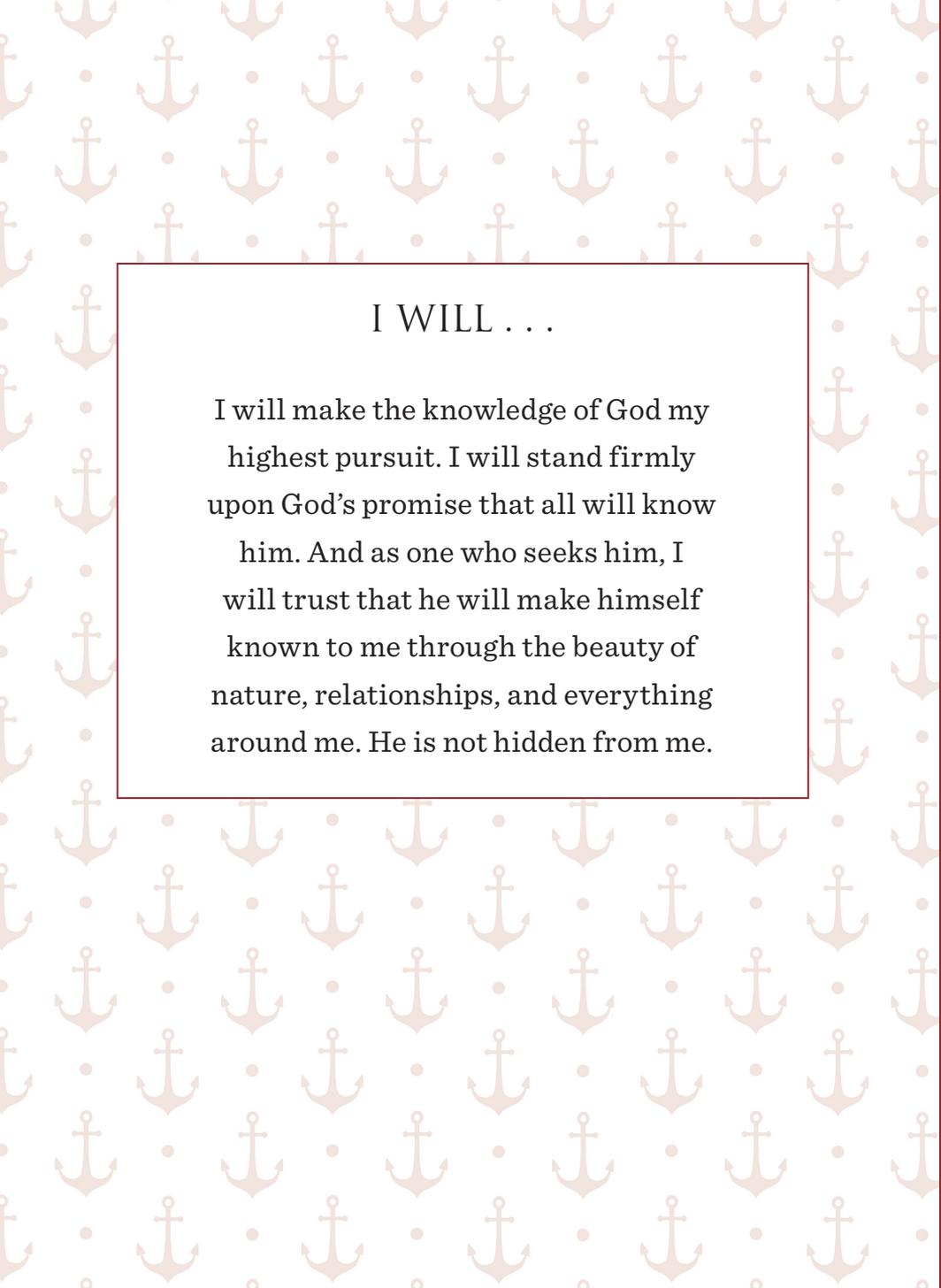
PRAYING GOD'S PROMISES

Thank you for being a God who wants me to know you. You have not hidden yourself from me.

Father, at times I have not believed in you. I have wanted more proof, more evidence. But you promised that you have revealed yourself in creation to all of your children. When doubts come, I will cling to your promise.

Your wisdom surpasses all wisdom on this earth. Your ways are so much higher than mine. I could study you and your Word for the rest of my life and still only scratch the surface of the depths of who you are. You are at once knowable and unknowable. You've revealed yourself to me, but so much of you is a mystery and always will be.

Deepen my knowledge of you, God. I want to know you more and understand you better. Reveal yourself to me through Scripture and through your creation. Reveal yourself to me through conversations and relationships. I am so grateful for the promise of a knowable God. Amen.



I WILL . . .

I will make the knowledge of God my highest pursuit. I will stand firmly upon God's promise that all will know him. And as one who seeks him, I will trust that he will make himself known to me through the beauty of nature, relationships, and everything around me. He is not hidden from me.

*You Are Stamped
with God's Image*

*“Let us make human beings
in our image, make them
reflecting our nature.”*

—GENESIS 1:26 THE MESSAGE

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

MAX LUCADO



OUR ULTIMATE
HOPE

7 DAYS OF PROMISE TO

RENEW YOUR SOUL

OUR ULTIMATE
HOPE

7 DAYS OF PROMISE TO
RENEW YOUR SOUL

MAX LUCADO



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

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The Eternal Promise

There is now no condemnation for
those who are in Christ Jesus.

—ROMANS 8:1

New York City.
If you want a view of the skyline, visit
the Brooklyn Bridge.

For entertainment go to Broadway.

Looking for inspiration? Tour the Statue of
Liberty.

Like to shop? The stores on Fifth Avenue
await your credit card.

But if you want to be depressed, utterly
overwhelmed, and absolutely distraught, take a
cab to the corner of the Avenue of the Americas
and West Forty-Fourth Street and spend a few
moments in the presence of the US National
Debt Clock. The sign is twenty-five feet wide,
weighs fifteen hundred pounds, and uses
306 bulbs to constantly, mercilessly, endlessly

declare the US debt and each family's share. The original clock wasn't built to run backward, but that feature has seldom been needed. Plans to install an updated model that can display some quadrillion dollars have been discussed.¹ If debt were a tidal wave, according to this sign the undertow is going to suck us out to sea.

I'm not an economist; I'm a preacher. But my monetary experience has taught me this: when people owe more than they own, expect trouble.

Again, I'm not an economist. I'm a preacher, which may explain the odd question that occurred to me as I pondered the debt clock. What if heaven had one of these? A marquee that measured not our fiscal debt but our spiritual one? Scripture often refers to sin in financial terminology. Did Jesus not teach us to pray, "Forgive us our debts" (Matthew 6:12)? If sin is a debt, do you and I have a dot matrix trespass counter in heaven? Does it click at each infraction?

We lie. *Click.*

We gossip. *Click.*

We demand our way. *Click.*

We doze off while reading a Lucado book.
Click, click, click.

Talk about depressing. A financial liability is one matter, but a spiritual one? The debt of sin has a serious consequence. It separates us from God.

Your iniquities have separated
you from your God;
your sins have hidden his face from you,
so that he will not hear. (Isaiah 59:2)

The algebra of heaven reads something like this: heaven is a perfect place for perfect people, which leaves us in a perfect mess. According to heaven's debt clock we owe more than we could ever repay. Every day brings more sin, more debt, and more questions like this one: "Who will deliver me?" (Romans 7:24 NKJV).

The realization of our moral debt sends some people into a frenzy of good works. Life becomes an unending quest to do enough, be better, accomplish more. A pursuit of piety. We attend church, tend to the sick, go on pilgrimages, and go on fasts. Yet deep within is the gnawing fear, *What if having done all that, I've not done enough?*

Other people respond to the list not with activity but unbelief. They throw up their hands

and walk away exasperated. No God would demand so much. He can't be pleased. He can't be satisfied. He must not exist. If he does exist, he is not worth knowing.

Two extremes. The legalist and the atheist. The worker desperate to impress God. The unbeliever convinced there is no God. Can you relate to either of the two? Do you know the weariness that comes from legalism? Do you know the loneliness that comes from atheism?

What do we do? Are despair and disbelief the only options?

No Condemnation

No one loved to answer that question more than the apostle Paul, who said, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

How could he say this? Had he not seen the debt we owe? He'd certainly seen his own. Paul entered the pages of Scripture as Saul, the self-professed Pharisee of all Pharisees and the most religious man in town. But all his scruples and law keeping hadn't made him a better person.

He was bloodthirsty and angry, determined to extinguish anything and everyone Christian.

His attitude began to change on the road to Damascus. That's when Jesus appeared to him in the desert, knocked him off his high horse, and left him sightless for three days. Paul could see only one direction: inward. And what he saw he did not like. He saw a narrow-minded tyrant. During his time of blindness God gave him a vision that a man named Ananias would restore his sight. So, when Ananias did, Paul "got up and was baptized" (Acts 9:18).

Within a few days he was preaching about Christ. Within a few years he was off on his first missionary journey. Within a couple of decades, he was writing the letters we still read today, each one of which makes the case for Christ and the cross.

We aren't told when Paul realized the meaning of grace. Was it immediately on the Damascus road? Or gradually during the three-day darkness? Or after Ananias restored his sight? We aren't told. But we know that Paul got grace. Or grace got Paul. Either way, he embraced the improbable offer that God would make us right with him through Jesus Christ. Paul's logic followed a simple outline:

Our debt is enough to sink us.
God loves us too much to leave us.
So, God has found a way to save us.

The Problem

Paul began his case for Christ by describing our problem: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). We haven’t met the standard God set. We were intended to bear the nature of God. To speak, act, and behave the way he speaks, acts, and behaves. To love as he loves. To value what he values. To honor those he honors. This is the glorious standard God has set. We have failed to meet it. Jesus, on the other hand, succeeded. “Christ never sinned” (2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV).

What a remarkable statement! Not once did Jesus turn right when he was supposed to turn left. He never stayed silent when he was supposed to speak, or spoke when he was supposed to stay silent. He was “tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin” (Hebrews 4:15). He was the image of God twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

When it comes to the standard, he is the standard. To be sinless is to be like Jesus.

But who can be?

We may have occasional moments of goodness and perform deeds of kindness, but who among us reflects the image of God all day every day? Paul couldn't find anyone. "As it is written: 'There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God'" (Romans 3:10-11).

People often bristle at the message of these verses. They take offense at its allegation. No one is righteous? No one seeks God? And then they produce their résumés of righteousness. They pay taxes. They love their families. They avoid addiction. They give to the poor. They seek justice for the oppressed. Compared to the rest of the world, they are good people.

Ah, but herein lies the problem. Our standard is not the rest of the world. Our standard is Christ. Compared to Christ, we, well . . . Can you hear the debt clock?

Sometime back I took up swimming for exercise. I didn't buy a Speedo, but I did buy some goggles, went to a pool, and gave it a go. Over the weeks I gradually progressed from a

tadpole to a small frog. I'm not much to look at, but I can get up and down the lane. In fact, I was beginning to feel pretty good about my progress.

So good, in fact, that when Josh Davis invited me to swim with him, I accepted. You remember Josh Davis, three-time gold medalist in the Atlanta Olympics. His waist size is my thigh size. Half of his warm-up is my entire workout. He is as comfortable in a swimming lane as most of us are in a cafeteria lane.

So when he offered to give me some pointers, I jumped in the pool. (A pool, incidentally, that bears the name Josh Davis Natatorium.) After all, I had two months of swimming experience under my belt . . . Senior Olympics? Who knows? So, with Josh in his lane and me next to him in mine, he suggested, "Let's swim two laps and see how fast you go." Off I went. I gave it all I had. I was surprised at the finish to see that he had touched the wall only seconds before me. I felt pretty good about myself. I half expected to see photographers and endorsers gathered on the edge of the pool.

"Have you been here long?" I panted.

"Just a few seconds."

“You mean I finished only a few seconds behind you?”

“That’s right.”

Whoa . . . Forget Senior Olympics. I’m thinking world-record holder. But then Josh added, “There was one difference. While you swam one lap, I swam three.” (I suspect he actually swam four.)

Josh raised the bar. He displayed swimming at the highest level.

On a minute scale he did in the pool what Jesus did for humanity.

Jesus demonstrated what a godly life looks like.

The Solution

So what are we to do? He is holy; we are not. He is perfect; we are not. His character is flawless; ours is flawed. A yawning canyon separates us from God. Might we hope that God will overlook it? He would, except for one essential detail. He is a God of justice. If he does not punish sin, he is not just. If he is not just, then what hope do we have of a just heaven? The next life would be occupied by sinners who found a loophole, who

skirted the system. Yet if God punishes us for our sin, then we are lost. So, what is the solution? Again, we turn to Paul for the explanation:

What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. (Romans 4:3–5)

To credit something is to make payment for it. I have a credit card. If I were to write a check to pay the balance on the card, the debt on the card would be removed, and I would be credited a zero balance. I would have no debt. No outstanding payment. No obligation. None whatsoever.

According to Paul, God has done the same with our spiritual debt. He presents Abraham as an example of a grace recipient. Yes, Abraham from 2000 BC! Abraham had not a credit-card debt but a spiritual debt. He had sinned. He was a good man, I am certain, but not good enough to live debt-free. His debt clock had abundant clicks.

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Every time he cursed his camel. *Click.*
Every time he flirted with a handmaiden. *Click.*
Every time he wondered where in the world
God was leading him and if God knew
where in the world he was headed. *Click.*
Click. Click.

But for all the bad things Abraham did, there was one good thing he chose to do. He believed. He put his faith in God. And because he believed, a wonderful, unspeakably great thing happened to his debt clock.

It was returned to zero!

“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” God’s promise to Abraham was salvation by faith. God’s promise to you and me is salvation by faith. Just faith.

God sacrificed Jesus on the altar of the world to clear that world of sin. Having faith in him sets us in the clear. God decided on this course of action in full view of the public—to set the world in the clear with himself through the sacrifice of Jesus, finally taking care of the sins he had so patiently endured. This is not only clear, but it’s *now*—this is

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current history! God sets things right. He also makes it possible for us to live in his rightness. (Romans 3:25–26 THE MESSAGE)

God never compromised his standard. He satisfied every demand of justice. Yet he also gratified the longing of love. Too just to overlook our sin, too loving to dismiss us, he placed our sin on his Son and punished it there. “God put the wrong on him who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God” (2 Corinthians 5:21 THE MESSAGE).

Now we understand the cry of Christ from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46).

Jesus felt the wrath of a just and holy God.

Wave after wave. Load after load. Hour after hour. He cried out the words of the psalm he would have known since his youth: “Why have you forsaken me?” He felt the separation between his Father and him.

And then when he could scarcely take any more, he cried, “It is finished!” (John 19:30 NASB). His mission was complete.

At the moment of Jesus’ death, an unbelievable miracle occurred. “Jesus cried out with a loud

voice, and breathed His last. Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (Mark 15:37–38 NKJV). “The veil separated the people from the temple’s Most Holy Place, and it had done so for centuries. According to tradition, the veil—a handbreadth in thickness—was woven of seventy-two twisted plaits, each plait consisting of twenty-four threads. The veil was apparently sixty feet long and thirty feet wide.”²

We aren’t talking about short, delicate drapes. This curtain was a wall made of fabric. The fact that it was torn from top to bottom reveals that the hands behind the deed were divine. God himself grasped the curtain and ripped it in two.

No more!

No more division. No more separation. No more sacrifices. “No condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

[Jesus] personally carried our sins
in his body on the cross
so that we can be dead to sin
and live for what is right.
By his wounds
you are healed.

(1 PETER 2:24 NLT)

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Heaven's work of redemption was finished. Christ's death brought new life. Whatever barrier that had separated—or might ever separate—us from God was gone.

Gone is the fear of falling short! Gone is the anxious quest for right behavior. Gone are the nagging questions: Have I done enough? Am I good enough? Will I achieve enough? The legalist finds rest. The atheist finds hope. The God of Abraham is not a God of burdens but a God of rest. He knows we are made of flesh. He knows we cannot achieve perfection. The God of the Bible is the One who says:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28–30)

When you lose your temper with your child, Christ intervenes. “I paid for that.” When you tell a lie and all of heaven groans, your Savior speaks up: “My death covered that sin.” As you lust

over someone's centerfold, gloat over someone's pain, covet someone's success, or cuss someone's mistake, Jesus stands before the tribunal of heaven and points to the blood-streaked cross. "I've already made provision. I've paid that debt. I've taken away the sins of the world."

Karl Barth described grace in this manner:

On the one side there is God in His glory as Creator and Lord. . . . And on the other side there is man, not merely the creature, but the sinner, the one who exists in the flesh and who in the flesh is in opposition to Him. It is not merely a frontier, but a yawning abyss. Yet this abyss is crossed, not by man, not by both God and man, but only by God. . . . This man does not even know how it comes about or happens to him.³

Salvation, from beginning to end, is a work of our Father. God does not stand on a mountain and tell us to climb it and find him. He comes down into our dark valley and finds us. He does not offer to pay all the debt minus a dollar if we'll pay the dollar. He pays every penny. He doesn't offer to complete the work if we will start

it. He does all the work, from beginning to end. He does not bargain with us, telling us to clean up our lives so he can help. He washes our sins without our help.

An elderly woman was once asked about the security of her salvation. Though she'd dedicated her life to the Lord, a cynic asked, "How can you be sure? How can you know that after all these years God won't let you sink into hell?"

"He would lose more than I would," she replied. "All I would lose would be my own soul. He would lose his good name."

What a gift God has given you. You've won the greatest lottery in the history of humanity, and you didn't even pay for the ticket! Your soul is secure, your salvation guaranteed. Your name is written in the only book that matters. You're only a few sand grains in the hourglass from a tearless, graveless, painless existence.

This is the message of God, the promise of grace. The declaration Paul preached with unwearied enthusiasm: "What we cannot do, God has done. He justifies us by his grace." Grace is entirely God's. God loving. God stooping. God offering. God caring and God carrying.

This is God's version of grace. Is it yours? Don't hurry too quickly past that question. Guilt simmers like a toxin in far too many souls. Do not let it have a place in yours. Before you turn the page, internalize this promise that is written with the crimson blood of Christ: "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

No condemnation. Not "limited condemnation," "appropriate condemnation," or "calculated condemnation." That is what people give people. What does God give his children? "No condemnation."

Stand on this promise. Or, better said, take this promise to the clock, your personal debt clock. As you look up at the insurmountable debt you owe, the debt you can never pay, let this promise be declared: "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Your Response

What are you supposed to do with this free gift of grace? Your response is three simple steps: admit, agree, accept.

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1. **Admit** that God has not held first place in your life, and ask him to forgive your sins.

“If we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness” (1 John 1:9 NLT).

2. **Agree** that Jesus died to pay for your sins and that he rose from the dead and is alive today.

“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9).

“Salvation is found in no one else [other than Jesus], for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

3. **Accept** God’s free gift of salvation. Don’t try to earn it.

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9).

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“To all who received him, he gave the right to become children of God. All they needed to do was to trust him to save them. All those who believe this are reborn!—not a physical rebirth . . . but from the will of God” (John 1:12–13 TLB).

Jesus says, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in” (Revelation 3:20).

With all my heart, I urge you to accept God’s destiny for your life. According to the Bible, “Jesus is the only one who can save people. His name is the only power in the world that has been given to save anyone. We must be saved through him!” (Acts 4:12 ERV).

Would you let him save you? This is the most important decision you will ever make. Why don’t you give your heart to him right now? **Admit** your need. **Agree** with his work. **Accept** his gift.

Go to God in prayer and tell him, *I am a sinner in need of grace. I believe that Jesus died for me on the cross. I accept your offer of salvation.* It’s a simple prayer with eternal results.

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I believe that Jesus Christ is the
Son of the living God. I want him
to be the Lord of my life.

Signed

Date

Once you've placed your faith in Christ, I urge you to take three steps. You'll find them easy to remember. Just think of these three words, each of which starts with a *b*: *baptism*, *Bible*, and *belonging*.

- **Baptism** demonstrates and celebrates our decision to follow Jesus. The water of baptism symbolizes God's grace. Just as water cleanses the body, so grace cleanses the soul. Jesus said, "Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16 NCV). When the apostle Paul became a believer, he was asked this question: "Now, why wait any longer? Get up, be baptized, and wash your sins away, trusting in him to save you" (Acts 22:16 NCV). Paul responded by being baptized immediately. You can too.
- **Bible** reading brings us face-to-face with God. God reveals himself to us through his Word by the Holy Spirit. "Let the teaching of Christ live in you richly" (Colossians 3:16 NCV).
- **Belonging** to a church reinforces your faith. A Christian without a church is like a

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baseball player without a team or a soldier without an army. You aren't strong enough to survive alone. "You should not stay away from the church meetings, as some are doing, but you should meet together and encourage each other" (Hebrews 10:25 NCV).

These three steps—baptism, Bible reading, and belonging to a church—are essential in your faith.

I pray you'll accept this great gift of salvation. Believe me, this is not only the most important decision you'll ever make, but it's also the greatest soul-altering decision you'll ever make. There's no higher treasure than God's gift of salvation.

If you're not sure where to begin reading the Bible, here are seven days of scriptures and prayers to get you started.

DAY 1

Let Go and Let God

The Promise: I can rest in the assurance of salvation.

People are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God. (Romans 4:5 NLT)

Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. (Psalm 32:1)

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8–9)

Everything worthwhile in life takes work. Getting an A instead of a C on that project. Earning that promotion at the company. Making a marriage thrive. We know effort will be

involved, yet we still strive for what we want. So we work, and we stretch, and we pull ourselves up by our bootstraps to achieve success.

And we think we have to do the same for God's approval. Perhaps we need to say a certain number of prayers or serve a few more hours at the soup kitchen just to make things right with God.

But we learn from Abraham one of the greatest promises of Scripture: we are made right with God by faith alone. When we align ourselves with God, we are given a perfect score, a seat at the table, and a place in the family. This is the gift of righteousness by faith.

Maybe you read that and think your faith must be perfect. After all, Abraham is called the father of faith. His faith must have been like a rock, sure and unbending. He must have set the standard for perfect faith. No doubts. No questions. No fear. If anyone had a perfect faith, it must have been Abraham.

That might be easy to believe, but it's not what the Bible says. Let's go back to Genesis 12, which records a covenant the Lord made with Abraham, who was called Abram at the time.

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The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

“I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.” (verses 1–3)

This covenant is noteworthy because of what God offered and what he required. He offered *everything* and required *nothing*. All Abraham had to do to receive it was believe.

But that wasn’t so easy. Abraham hadn’t seen what you and I have seen. He didn’t have the benefits of Scripture. He didn’t know the stories of Peter’s redemption or Paul’s conversion. He hadn’t heard of the virgin birth or the empty tomb.

Abram was simply told to believe. That should be simple enough for the man called the father of faith.

Not quite.

God told Abram to go into the land of Canaan, which was already occupied by bloodthirsty tyrants. And God told Abram he would have a nation of descendants, even though he had no children, and his wife was barren.

Canaan was occupied, the crib was empty, and Abram had a crisis of faith. He asked the Lord, “What can you give me since I remain childless?” (Genesis 15:2). That doesn’t exactly sound like a man of great faith.

God responded with a vision and another word. He showed Abram the sky and told him that his offspring would equal the number of the stars in the heavens. Abram could have walked away. He could have laughed off the very idea of having a child in his eighties. But he didn’t. “Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).

Looking at Abram’s faith, God said, “That’s enough. That’s all I desire.” God granted Abraham a spiritual inheritance not because of his piety or his pedigree but because of his faith. It was a hesitant faith. It was a wavering faith. But it was enough.

The Lord isn’t looking for perfect faith. His

promise to Abraham was salvation by faith. His promise to Paul was salvation by faith. God's promise to me and to you is the same.

Gone is the fear of falling short. Gone is the quest to feel right, do right, or know the right things. Gone is the anxiety of uncertainty. We never have to wonder if we've done enough. We are guaranteed our spot in the family of God.

If, after you have accepted the gift of salvation, the old habits of striving and working for God's approval resurface, remember Abraham with his imperfect faith. It was all God desired, and it's all he desires of you.

A Prayer of Promise

God, you are good and righteous and holy. Yet you offer to make me right with you through my bumbling, stumbling faith. I am forever grateful.

Thank you for being enough so I don't have to be. I could never be perfect on my own. And it's such a relief just to rest in the knowledge that you are.

Forgive me when I pick up old habits and

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try to earn your love. Remind me that all I need to do is put my faith in you. Let my actions be motivated by what you've already done in my life, a response to your free gift. In Jesus' name, amen.