

PRAYING
THE
PROMISES
OF
JESUS

RICK
STEDMAN



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*To Dean and Marcia Holst:
In-laws by marriage,
friends by choice,
and exemplary promise-makers and promise-keepers.*

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PART ONE

Why Pray the Promises of Jesus?

The Greatest Promise- Maker of All Time

“The future is as bright as the promises of God.”

ADONIRAM JUDSON

What if every promise of Jesus came true in your life? Jesus was the ultimate promise-maker and promise-keeper, and among the many astonishing promises to his followers were these: to love us, to fill us with joy, to strengthen us, to give us peace and rest, and to prepare an eternal home for us.

Would you like your life to be molded and shaped by these promises of Jesus rather than by the broken promises of this world? Would you like to see Jesus’ promises come true for those you love? Our lives—and the lives of our loved ones—can be transformed as we learn to pray the promises of Jesus daily.

If you want your life to change, the power is in the promises.

I invite you to journey with me in the pages of this book as we learn to pray the promises of Jesus. The promises of Jesus are incredibly powerful, and praying his promises is an effective and enjoyable way to pray. After all, we have the perfect model for both prayer and promises—Jesus himself.

Jesus—A Prolific Promise-Maker

Jesus was the greatest promise-maker and promise-keeper who ever lived. He made promises to his disciples, the crowds, and his opponents. He promised grieving sisters, a humble centurion, a penitent thief on

an adjacent cross, and even those who called for his execution. Almost everywhere he went and to whomever he spoke, he made quite remarkable promises:

- “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Luke 21:33).
- “Don’t be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed” (Luke 8:50).
- “You will see heaven open” (John 1:51).
- “Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day” (John 6:54 NLT).
- “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2 NASB).
- “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62).
- “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18,20).
- “Look, I am coming soon!” (Revelation 22:7).

Jesus was not shy about making promises. Students of the Bible have compiled different lists of the promises of Jesus, some of which number in the hundreds. As these lists show, Jesus was a prodigious promise-maker.

Plus, Jesus was a promise-keeper. When he said he would do something, he did it—no matter how impossible sounding or far-fetched.

Jesus used promises to shape the future of his followers’ lives. Through making and keeping promises, Jesus reached into their tomorrows and changed the course and content of their lives. The promises of Jesus were exceedingly powerful:

- To several unknown fishermen, Jesus said, “Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people” (Mark 1:17). As a result, these few men changed the world.
- To a grief-stricken father whose daughter had died, Jesus said, “Don’t be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed” (Luke 8:50). To everyone’s astonishment, Jesus kept that promise.
- He asked two of his followers to walk into a city where they would find a colt, and he promised that the owner would allow them to borrow it. When this came to pass, the followers learned that Jesus’ promises even had power over future events (Matthew 21:1-6).
- To his confused disciples, Jesus said he would be tortured, killed, and then “on the third day he [would] rise again” (Luke 18:33). What type of man makes promises about dying and coming back to life and keeps them—on schedule? Yet Jesus did just that.
- Jesus told his disciples, “You will all fall away...but after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.” An overconfident Peter promised, “Even if all fall away, I will not.” Jesus responded, “Truly I tell you...before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times” (Mark 14:27-30). Peter broke his promise whereas Jesus kept his, which is a foreshadowing of how we may break our promises to the Lord, but he never will.
- Before his ascension, Jesus told his followers to remain in Jerusalem and wait for the gift the Father had promised; they waited and were filled with the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4). They changed from confused followers to confident witnesses.

Through this process of promise-making and promise-keeping, Jesus influenced his followers. He transformed them into better people than they were before. He took the unfinished clay of their lives and, through

the power of promises, molded—and fired!—them into remarkable world-changers. He took weak, impulsive, fearful, doubtful people and, through the miracle of commitments, forged them into a confident force that altered history.

Would you like the promises of Jesus to come true in your life? To have your life molded and shaped by his promises rather than by the broken promises of this world? To experience the power of Jesus' promises today? If so, let's pray together this prayer:

Lord,

You did an amazing thing in the lives of the apostles.

You took average, diverse, and unimpressive men and

transformed them into some of the most influen-

tial people the world has ever known. Fearful, impul-

sive, and faithless men became towering figures of faith,

peace, and courage. Angry, unhappy, and lonely indi-

viduals discovered love, friendships, and community.

Incredibly, you did this not while you were with them,

but after you were crucified, buried, and risen. You

were able to strongly affect them, even after your death,

through the power of your promises, enabled by the

Holy Spirit.

Based on that evidence, I ask you to do the same in my life.

Transform my doubts into faith and my fear into cour-

age; change my worries to peace and my anxieties to

rest; turn my sadness to joy and my loneliness to love.

May I learn to live according to your promises, through

the power of your Spirit.

In your name I pray. Amen.

Practical Prayer Pointers

If you are like most readers, I'll bet that you read that prayer silently rather than audibly. If that is the case, I beg you to give this a try: pray the prayers in this book aloud, even though it might seem unnecessary

or uncomfortable at first. There are many advantages and biblical reasons for praying out loud, which I will discuss in some of the sidebars in this book. The first biblical reason is this: 99.9 percent of all prayers in the Bible are vocalized. In fact, one has to work very hard to find even a few clear examples of silent, inaudible prayer. And even these may, at closer look, not refer to truly silent prayers.¹

I believe that audible praying is an excellent way to grow in one's prayer ability. Of course, there is nothing wrong with praying silently in one's mind rather than vocally through one's mouth. The Bible is clear that God can read our thoughts (Genesis 6:5; 1 Chronicles 28:9; Psalm 139:2-4; Jeremiah 12:3), so he hears our silent prayers just as he does our vocalized prayers.

Silent prayer is not a sin—but it may surprise you to learn that it is not as biblical as praying aloud. In addition, I also suggest, in subsequent sidebars, that silent prayers are not as effective either. Could it be that current levels of prayerlessness and dissatisfaction with prayer among evangelical Christians might partially be due to a simple lack of praying aloud?

In my experience as a pastor, almost all Christians pray silently in their private prayer times and miss out on the many benefits of oral prayer. So if you speak to God from your heart but not with your lips in the majority of your prayers, why not try the other manner of praying that is vastly more common in Scripture?

Praying the Promises of Jesus Daily

As we have seen, Jesus was a fabulous promise-maker and promise-keeper. But can his promises come true in our lives? How do we access the power of Jesus' promises and actually experience their fulfillment today? The answer is the premise of this book: the promises of Jesus become realized in our lives through prayer. Our lives—and the lives of those we love—are transformed for the better as we learn to pray the promises of Jesus daily.

Since this book is about prayer, let's pause and talk to God about this

rather than just think about it. Take a few seconds and pray this prayer aloud:

Dear Lord,

Could this be true? Could my life be dramatically changed for the better by the promises you have made?

If so, I ask you to shape my life, my plans, my relationships, and my destiny through your promises. I pray that your promises, Jesus, would gain control of my beliefs, thoughts, and behaviors. May my life become what you always have intended it to be.

In your name I pray. Amen.

A Map for Our Journey

In this book, we will travel together the path of prayer, discovering how to pray more effectively and enjoyably by praying the promises of Jesus. I've divided our journey into three different legs. In part 1, we will discover why the promises of Jesus are powerful, and how he uses them to shape and mold our lives. Along the way, we will also grasp why promises are essential in relationships and why broken promises are so damaging. Here we will reaffirm the need to be better promise-makers and promise-keepers ourselves.

In part 2, we will learn how to pray the promises of Jesus based upon a method I stumbled upon several years ago. At that time, I was concerned about the reality of spiritual warfare, and decided to do what I could to better protect my family members and friends from the attacks of the evil one. So I began to pray the armor of God for those I love, one piece per day of the week. As I described in the first book in this prayer series, *Praying the Armor of God*, I found that to be an easy, enjoyable, and effective way to pray.

In time, I began to associate other biblical lists with the days of the week. I began to pray the fruit of the Spirit, the Beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer, and the Psalms. And, of course, I began to systematically pray the promises of Jesus.

I chose the promises of Jesus because of the inherent power in his

promises, and their potential to transform not only the present, but also the *futures* of those for whom I prayed. I arranged the promises into seven general categories, and then assigned each category to a day of the week. In this way, I was able to easily memorize and pray key promises of Jesus:

Sunday: I'm **S**urrounded by love.

Monday: I'm **M**aking happiness a habit.

Tuesday: I'm **T**rusting in Gods' strength.

Wednesday: I'm **W**anting what God wants.

Thursday: I'm **T**rading my troubles for peace.

Friday: I'm **F**inding freedom.

Saturday: I'm **S**o excited about heaven.

Once we memorize these days and categories, we can keep Jesus' promises in our minds all day long. If our thoughts wander away from God, it is easy to remember the day's promise. For instance, we might think, *Well, since it is Wednesday, the promises of today start with a W. Oh yeah—I'm Wanting what God wants.* In this prayer method, Wednesdays are dedicated to praying the promises of Jesus about God's will. On the midpoint of the week, we focus on what God wants, and we ask for our hearts to be changed so that we grow to desire what God desires. We remember how Jesus prayed about God's will in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). And we recall that he promised, "Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name" (John 16:23). Based on these great and precious promises, we ask for God's will to be done in our lives, into the lives of those we love, and into the lives of anyone else that crosses our paths that day.

On some days I pray in this manner only once or twice, but on other days this becomes a theme that I return to over and over, and I find myself praying without ceasing. On *Sundays* I walk by people in church and pray for them to feel *Surrounded by love*. I drive through our city on

Mondays and ask God to *Make happiness a habit* in the homes that I pass. I watch the evening news on *Thursdays* and find myself praying that the people in the news stories would *Trade their troubles for peace*, because the peace of Jesus is the best solution to the problems in our world today. On *Fridays* I may walk through our neighborhood and pray for each family to discover the *Freedom* of God in Christ. I find myself obeying Paul's directive to "pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5:17) as my heart seems to beat to the rhythm of each promise on its assigned day.

In part 3, we will practice praying the promises of Jesus daily through the use of guided prayers. I recommend that you commit to a four-week prayer adventure, which will take less than five minutes a day each morning and can then fill your mind and soul for the rest of the day.

Each week illustrates different ways to pray the promises of Jesus and utilizes numerous Scriptures as the content of the prayers. In the beginning, I recommend that you pray these prayers aloud, verbatim. Over time, you will gradually acclimate to this method of praying Scripture, and you will find yourself automatically memorizing many words and phrases. Feel free to adapt these prayers to your own style and manner, since getting rigid or legalistic about prayer is counterproductive. The goal is personalization rather than rote memorization. Gradually you will find that your prayer confidence and vocabulary increase, and you will hear yourself praying many of these scriptural phrases in different contexts, such as a table grace, a small group prayer time, or even while leading a congregational prayer in church.

After a small section that teaches what I call Daily Prayer Openers, the four weeks are divided in this way:

- Week One: Starting to Pray the Promises of Jesus
- Week Two: Praying the Promises of Jesus for Others
- Week Three: Praying the Promises of Jesus as Reflected in the Old Testament
- Week Four: Praying the Promises of Jesus as Reflected in the New Testament

After the four weeks, you may choose to repeat the cycle again, and again, and again. Or you may choose to focus on certain weeks that are closer to your heart. Feel free to park on a particularly meaningful week and pray it several weeks in a row until you feel released to move on. Also, feel free to skip a week if it is not helpful for you.

Before we launch into learning about the power of the promises of Jesus, let's pray:

Dear Jesus,

I marvel when I consider your closeness to the Father, the intimate relationship you had with him every day. On many days you met him early in the morning to talk, on others you spoke with him as the need arose, and occasionally you spent the whole night in prayer. You felt so close to him that you called him "Abba," and you were certain that he always heard your requests.

Yet you seemed to have a freedom and flexibility in your prayer life, and never became ensnared in legalistic traps. Your prayers were based not on rigid formulas but on a real relationship with the Father and Spirit.

So help me, as I go through the suggested prayers in this book, to remember that it's all about learning to talk naturally with you and developing a life with you always on my mind and in my heart.

In your precious and patient name I pray. Amen.

Practical Prayer Pointers

In the do-your-own-thing era of the seventies, we teenagers were suspicious of anything that appeared canned or false. Free-form was in vogue in everything from modern art to poetry. In the church, this meant that we were suspicious of prewritten prayers, which seemed to lack spontaneity and authenticity. So we opted for free-form prayers.

Honestly, most of them were awful. The same phrases repeated over and over, much more often than we would ever do in normal

conversation: *Lord I just want to ask...I just want to say...I just-just-just.* Or they sounded like this: *God I really...really...really.* Or *Father-God...Father-God...Father-God*, as if it were one word rather than two. Plus, the prayers lacked variety and depth. Just the same-old same-old, again and again.

Then I was taught to pray Scripture—aloud. Immediately, I felt like my prayer life jumped from kindergarten into college. And even though I didn't write them out, my public prayers took on a new depth and breadth. I began to hear myself praying in public what I had prayed aloud in private, the words of Scripture, adapted as appropriate: "Lord, I pray that the eyes of their hearts be enlightened, that they may know the hope to which you have called us...I ask that their love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight...I pray that you would help them not concern themselves with great matters or things too wonderful for them...I ask that goodness and mercy will follow them all the days of their lives, and that they will dwell in the house of the Lord forever..." (Ephesians 1:18, Philippians 1:9, Psalm 131:1; 23:6).

As a result, I wholeheartedly encourage you, in your private times of prayer, to pray aloud. Pray with your Bible open, and as you read a passage and think of a person to whom it may apply, pray it for him or her. Pray the Psalms, the Proverbs, and the whole New Testament. Pray the prayers in this book, aloud, and over and over. Authenticity and repetition are not mutually exclusive.

The Power of Promises

“When we make promises, we reach into tomorrow’s oceans of uncertainty and create islands of security.”

LEWIS SMEDES

God is the ultimate promise-maker and promise-keeper. The Bible is chock-full of the promises of God, and Jesus, in the Gospels, stays true to form. The promises of Jesus hold vast power to shape our lives. His promises have the power to provide for us, his followers, the lives we have been longing for.

If you want your life to change, the power is in the promises. It is through promises that God transforms our lives, which is why both making and keeping promises are so important. But before I explain why promises are so powerful, allow me to address the skeptics among us.

“But He Broke His Promise...”

Some of you may be very skeptical—even suspicious—about promises. If so, I don’t blame you. After all, our lives are littered with the painful debris of broken promises.

“She promised to be faithful.”

“He promised we would get married.”

“My parents promised they would never get divorced.”

“But my boss promised me a raise.”

“My business partner promised to be honest this time.”

“I voted for him because he promised so many things.”

So many broken promises clutter the landscape of our lives that it

makes me wonder: why do we still make promises—tons of them—in spite of the dismal track record of our species?

I think it's because we humans are, at our core, promise-making beings. Even people who give up on promises and assert they will never make any more—well, that's a promise to themselves. This suggests that we are hard-wired to make promises; we can't avoid them.

This is a shocking truth, especially when we consider that so many of the promises made today are not kept. Millions of couples marry each year, in spite of the huge number of divorces. Business people sign contracts, but only after inserting enough legal loopholes so they can back out if needed. We make New Year's resolutions, which are promises to ourselves, even though studies show we often abandon them in less than a week. Politicians may take the cake in this area: they make promises and then break them so routinely that it almost seems part of the job description.

We are promise-making beings, but also profoundly bad at keeping those promises. We go steady, shake hands, sign contracts, and cross-our-hearts-hope-to-die. Then we break up, shake our fists at one another, nullify agreements, and accuse one another of cheating hearts.

If you want proof that we humans are poor promise-keepers, just listen to country western music for a while. I'll bet that you hear two recurring themes: people believe in God, and they cheat on their spouses. How messed up is that?

Carrie Underwood sang both "Jesus Take the Wheel" (2005) and "Before He Cheats" (2006). Hank Williams's top hits include "Your Cheatin' Heart" (1953) and "I Saw the Light" (1948). Sometimes the songs are autobiographical. Randy Travis put out several gospel albums, but only after justifying his own marital failures in "Reasons I Cheat" (1986). Alan Jackson's *Precious Memories II* was named Top Christian Album at the 2014 Billboard Music Awards, and he also admitted to infidelity when his recording of "Who's Cheatin' Who?" (1997) was at the top of the charts. Shania Twain sang, "Whose Bed Have Your Boots Been Under?" (1995), and then divorced her husband when she discovered the bed was her best friend's. Some songs even get violent: in

Miranda Lambert's "Kerosene" (2005), the jilted spouse leaves a smoldering corpse behind, literally.

Why this detour into musical celebrities and hits? The point is this: songs don't become popular unless they hit a deep emotional chord with the listeners. And songs about infidelity and broken promises do just that: they express what so many people feel, which is hurt and betrayal due to broken promises. This hurt is common to us all, which is why the songs first hit a nerve, and then hit the top of the charts.

If you have been hurt by broken promises, then I encourage you to join me in this prayer:

Dear Lord,

There are so many things I desire in life, so many dreams I have deep in my heart. I desire to love and be loved, to have a healthy and loving family, and to have a marriage that lasts a lifetime (if single: friendships that last a lifetime).

But I know these things require commitments, and because I've been deeply wounded by broken promises, I'm afraid to trust promises anymore—even my own.

So help me, dear Lord, to overcome my fears and learn anew the value of promises.

In humble hope, I pray. Amen.

Practical Prayer Pointers

Learning to pray is like learning new vocabulary words or even an entire language. To learn new words, it is best to speak them vocally, not silently. As we say words aloud, we mold them in our mouths, infuse them with our breath, and feel them with our teeth and tongues; we almost taste their form and structure. If we do this often enough, our body will form the habit of saying the word. Muscle memory and synaptic patterns help us remember the word later, even entire phrases and prayers. For instance, many people can repeat the Lord's Prayer or

the Apostles' Creed, though they have never tried to memorize either. They just repeated the words, aloud, week after week in their childhood church. In time, they not only knew the prayers, but also could pray them aloud in public.

In like fashion, I recommend that the prayers in this book be prayed aloud. Even a whisper is better than silence. And don't be afraid of praying the same prayers over and over. In time, this will increase your personal prayer vocabulary, as well as your felicity in prayer. In time, it will be easier for you to pray audibly with others, whether one-on-one, in small groups, or even in large settings. You will be able to say publicly what you have said many times in private.

Why Do We Keep Making Promises?

If humans are so shockingly poor at keeping promises and broken promises are so painful, then the logical question is: why do we keep making them? Don't you think, if secular evolutionists are correct, that this behavior would have been extinguished long ago? Are we masochists or just foolish?

I think the answer is neither. Instead, maybe we are inveterate promise-makers because God is a promise-maker, and we are created in his image (Genesis 1:26-27). Throughout the Bible, God makes promises. To Adam and Eve, both before and after the fall, and even to their son, Cain. To Noah and his family. To Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The list is endless. The God revealed in the Bible is a persistent promise-maker.

Plus, God is the consummate promise-keeper. God, unlike humans, keeps his promises. Every one. 100 percent. No exceptions. God is the ultimate promise-maker and promise-keeper (Psalm 145:13). But why does God make promises? Why does he not just act in the present, rather than make promises about the future?

The answer to this question has at least two parts, so here's the first part: *Promises are God's tool to fix what's broken in this universe—especially us.*

I'm convinced that promises are one way God fine-tunes our lives, to help us achieve lives brimming with love, happiness, and fulfillment. His

promises have the power to improve our lives tremendously and enable us to become all that God created us to be. A promise is an incredible, powerful tool.

I've always loved tools. During college I worked at a welding supply company, and we all had nicknames based on our favorite tools. One guy was Torch, because his solution to every problem was, "Let me burn it off." Another employee was Duct Tape, another the Hammer, and I was Vise Grips (still my favorite tool to this day).

A promise is also a tool, but an absolutely unique one. Most tools shape existing objects: a saw shapes a piece of wood, and a file molds a piece of metal. But a promise is extraordinary because it doesn't shape a tangible item. Instead, a promise shapes *the future*.

Think about tomorrow. What will happen? The potential events that could occur are innumerable, more than the grains of sand on a beach. Tomorrow is a blank canvas, a tabula rasa, an exponential mass of potentialities. It is formless and empty, like the heavens and earth in the opening verses of Genesis. It is a wild, complete unknown.

But into the vacuous emptiness of tomorrow, a promise reaches out and gives shape to the future. A promise—catch this!—creates the future. In the classic words of Lewis Smedes (depicted in the opening words of this chapter), "When we make promises, we reach into tomorrow's oceans of uncertainty and create islands of security."¹ Wow. In my opinion, that is one of the best phrases ever formulated.

How does this work? Well, let me give you an example. While writing the last paragraph, one of my sons texted me and asked if we could talk on the phone tomorrow. Due to the busyness of his college life, we decided to set a phone appointment for tomorrow evening at eight o'clock. Suddenly, the future begins to take shape. Together, he and I have reached out into the formless abyss of tomorrow's unknowns and have established a known point of contact. Into the chaos of tomorrow's randomness, we have brought a bit of order.

Actually, I have been doing this for him since his birth. Unbeknownst to him, when he was born I made an unvoiced promise. In my heart, I intentioned: *My boy, as long as God gives me breath, I will always be there for you. No matter what the future holds, you can count on me. I promise.*

In that act, I reached out into the years of tomorrows and brought structure into my life as well as his. He wasn't able to comprehend it at the time, and honestly neither was I. I was pledging myself to him unilaterally. *Son, as far as it is possible with me, in the future you always will find me there with you, present in spirit, if not physically.*

Till Death Do Us Part...

The promises I made to him (and his siblings) were based on earlier promises I made to his mother, Amy, my wife of over twenty-five years. Even before he was conceived, I promised his mother “to love and honor, for richer or poorer, for better or worse, in sickness and in health, till death do us part.” Before that promise (and her reciprocal promise to me), Amy and I lived separate lives. I didn't even know she existed until about two years before that moment. Our lives could have diverged in a zillion different ways.

But on our marriage day, young and naïve as we were, we exchanged promises. We stretched out together, in hope and faith, and grasped the future. A few words brought contour to countless future moments. Today, though our roads may diverge due to work, errands, or whatever, I know that at the end of the day, she will come home. And I will do the same. Unless something tragic—God forbid—intervenes, we will be together tonight...and tomorrow night...and the night after...till death do us part. One simple, mutual promise created a different—and much better—future for us both.

Amy and I also have promised each other to never divorce. In fact, we have a “We Will Never Divorce” certificate taped to our bedroom mirror, signed and dated by us both. (A few years ago, hundreds of couples in our church did the same. It was our congregation's way of stemming the tide of marital failures in our little corner of the world.) Our children have seen this certificate, and they know how thoroughly we are committed to one another. This lifelong promise has created, for our kids, a home that is an island of security in a world of insecure relationships. No matter how confusing or chaotic a particular day might be, they know that when they come home, it will be to parents who are still together and to a family that will always be there for one another.

They have seen the parents of their close friends divorce, and they have witnessed the pain and lasting damage that resulted. But we have determined—we have promised—that they will never have to worry about that in our home. And they know that Amy and I are not perfect. We get mad at each other at times, act in immature ways (okay, that one is more my issue than hers), and even, on occasion, fight in front of our kids. The point: even imperfect people can keep difficult promises.

And the promises she and I made to each other were, in turn, made possible by the promise-making and promise-keeping parents that we both are blessed to have. Our parents made similar vows and kept them for a lifetime. As did our grandparents, great-grandparents, and on and on. Is it too much to say that my daily life is still shaped by the promises made in generations past? I think not. Our ability to keep our promises to each other is heavily influenced by our parents' and grandparents' faithfulness.

(This is one reason I chose to dedicate this book to my in-laws, Dean and Marcia Holst. Their example of faithfulness and promise-keeping in marriage contributed, I believe, to Amy's ability to do the same in our marriage. So if you are reading this, thanks again, Dean and Marcia.)

To sum it up: our lives are shaped by our promises, built on the promises of others, and again on those of still others. We are indeed promise-making beings.

Humans are known as *homo sapiens*, which in Latin means “wise man.” But as I look at the current insanity of our world—the wars, unnecessary sufferings, addictions, and dysfunctions—I wonder if the designation “wise” fits our species. Maybe what defines us is not wisdom, but our ability to transcend time, to reach into our tomorrows and make and keep promises. Maybe we should be called *homo promittens*, which is the Latin word for “promising.” Thus, *homo promittens* translates as “promising man,” because *pro* means “forth” or “forward,” and *mittere* means “to send.” (Sorry, but *promittens* has nothing to do with gloves or mittens.) A promise is literally a “sending-forward,” an act that reaches forward and changes tomorrow.

This is why, in spite of our bad track record, we can't help ourselves. We keep making promises. It's our nature. It's how we bring form to the future, how we turn dreams into reality. It's how hope becomes actual. When we make promises, we are like God: we create something that has never before existed. We are made in the image of God, and though we cannot create substances *ex nihilo*, we can bring appointments and future connections into existence. We can create tomorrow.

Dear Lord,

Thank you for the tremendous power you have given me to reach out into tomorrow and create a better future through making and keeping promises.

I want to be a person who is faithful and whose word is true and trustworthy. I know your Word promises that you will not forsake your faithful ones, so I want to be that type of person.

So I ask, dear Jesus, please give me the strength to be like you: a wise promise-maker and faithful promise-keeper.

In your grace. Amen.

Practical Prayer Pointers

How do silent prayers and audible prayers work together? It is my opinion that as we learn to pray better audibly, it increases our ability to pray better silently. However, the opposite is not always true. So I recommend, especially for new believers, a dedicated, private prayer time during the day in which you can learn the language and content of prayer. As you intone these prayers aloud, over and over, they become words and phrases that you can later call to mind. The audible words you have prayed will form linguistic habits and will become the go-to content of your silent prayers throughout the day.

Thus, vocalized prayers become the foundation upon which silent prayers can be built. Skyscrapers have deep concrete foundations, and the depth of the concrete footings determines the potential height of

the building. In the same way, the depth of our audible, private prayers becomes the foundation for our silent, continual prayers.

Switching metaphors, we might say that prayer is similar to learning a foreign language in that expertise in speech precedes the ability to think in that language. In the same way, we learn to pray without ceasing after we have gained some expertise praying verbally, and especially praying Scripture aloud.

So promises are powerful tools that God uses to fix our brokenness and guide our futures. But how does God do this, and how does this relate to prayer? And on a more personal level, what can each of us do to make sure that God's promises come true in our lives? The answers to these questions await us in the next chapter.