

Prayer as Expression (18): Promise

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[0 : 0 0] by trusting the promises, and by enjoying the promises. First of all, we can work our way out of apathy and prayer by knowing the promises, knowing the promises.

God is a God of promise, for every day a promise from God. His name is not God, that is what he is. His name is Lord, in small capital letters. It means Yahweh, Jehovah, I am who I am.

This is the covenant name of God, a covenant as you know being a set of promises God makes and seals with the blood of life. A recent biblical scholarship, both here in the UK and overseas, has convincingly shown that the big story of the Bible is that of God's covenant with mankind.

So the whole history of God's relationship with us as human beings is encoded in promise. And that means we cannot understand anything about God outside the sphere of his promises to us.

[1 : 1 9] We cannot understand the birth of Jesus. We cannot understand the death and resurrection of Jesus without understanding the promises of God.

This is the so-called big story of Scripture. And yet for all that, I guess our great concern is what happens to us day by day as Christians.

And as I say, God is the God of promise. For every day a promise from God. You know, I wonder if we realize just how many promises God makes us in the Bible.

But there aren't hundreds. There are thousands. There aren't thousands. There are tens of thousands. And I don't just mean the obvious promises like what Jesus promised in Matthew 11, 28.

You know, come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. I mean everything God says about who he is and who we are.

[2 : 2 6] Turn with me in your Bible if you have it in front of you to Deuteronomy and chapter 4 and verse 35. Deuteronomy chapter 4 and verse 35.

Deuteronomy 4, 35.

You were shown these things so that you might know that the Lord is God. Beside him there is no other. So that you may know the Lord is God.

Beside him there is no other. Think of all the applications of that statement. We can turn into promises. It means that the only God there is, is the Lord.

When we pray, it is to the Lord we come. The Lord and not another. And when we pray, the Lord to whom we come, he loves us.

[3 : 3 0] And he wants to know everything about us. And when we pray, the Lord to whom we come is infinitely wise. And he will give us only what is good for us.

And when we pray, the Lord to whom we come is almighty. And could do things both small and great. You see these promises and so many more can be fairly derived from this one verse.

Deuteronomy 4, 35. Know that the Lord is God. Beside him there is no other. So I say hundreds.

Thousands. Tens of thousands of promises. Not just the ones we know. But the ones we can also discover for ourselves. Knowing the promises of God.

For every day a promise from God. When I was a boy, I knew just about every plant which grew in the forest behind our family home in Galsby.

[4 : 3 7] I could spend most of the day in that forest and never get hungry. Because I knew exactly what kind of grasses and berries I could eat.

So what I knew about the flora of that forest meant I never went hungry. What we know of God's promises will mean that we never go hungry for the grace of God.

I wonder whether you ever get bored in prayer. Run out of things to pray for. The first step to regaining your vibrancy in prayer is to know the promises of God.

To use our eyes to read scripture. To use our minds to think through the promises of scripture. God is the God of promise and his name is the Lord.

Knowing the promises. The second step to breaking out of the rut of staleness in prayer is trusting the promises. Trusting the promises.

[5 : 41] God is not only the God of promise. He is faithful to them all. As our verse says to us, the Lord is faithful to all his promises.

The Lord is reliable. The Lord is sure. He is unfailing. We can trust him to keep every promise he has made. For as many as we can imagine them to be, his faithfulness to them all is greater still. Heaven and earth should sooner pass away than that God should be unfaithful to even the smallest of his promises or the costliest of his promises.

As we said on Sunday morning, Jesus spoke of the smallest sparrows of the field being known to God. And therefore, how much more does he care for us?

The extent that he has numbered the very hairs on our heads. Well, that's how God is toward his promises. He is faithful to them all.

[6 : 45] And yet, for us to experience the faithfulness of these promises, we ourselves need faith. I clearly remember the late David Ford preaching a short series of sermons here in Glasgow City Free Church on the Book of Jonah.

Maybe some of you do as well. I'll never forget one of the things he said. Faith is the key that opens God's promises.

Faith is the key that opens God's promises. But that's the sense in which we're to understand Psalm 145.13.

That not only are we to know the promises of God, but we're to trust them also. The Lord is faithful to all his promises. That's the truth. But it's our faith in his faithfulness which opens the promises to us.

But then you say, well, that's the very thing I'm struggling with. My faith in the promises of God. But is there not also a promise of God for that?

[7 : 57] A promise of God for our unbelief? In Ephesians 2.8, we learn that even the faith with which we believe is a gift of God.

And Jesus says to us in Matthew 7.7, he says, Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you. The very faith with which we believe in God's promise is God's gift.

And it's ours for the asking. And so as we come to him, we pray, Lord, I believe. Help thou mine unbelief.

And he gives us the faith we need to trust his promises. Now, these are very easy words to say, but they're very difficult words to accept when we're going through difficult times in life.

But are these not the times when the promises of God become most precious to us? Are these not the times for which God framed these thousands of gospel promises and when our faith becomes something more than writing on a page or words on a preacher's lips?

[9 : 13] God promises us in Psalm 91 and verse 15. I think this is perhaps the most precious promise of Scripture as far as I'm concerned.

Psalm 91 and verse 15. He says, I will be with him in trouble. I will be with him in trouble. Does it not require us to be in trouble for us first to experience the witness of God?

But it's faith, you see, both in the good times and the bad, which is the key, which opens God's promises. Trusting the promises.

And then thirdly and briefly, the third way we break out of the rut of stale prayer is by enjoying the promises. Enjoying the promises. I wonder whether you think that sometimes as Christians we can overcomplicate the gospel.

Knowing the promises and trusting the promises of God, perhaps it's time now to enjoy the promises of God. To rest on them.

[10 : 20] And to enjoy the experience of them. For every day a promise from God. We've seen that already. And there's thousands and there's tens of thousands of them.

For us to rely upon and enjoy for ourselves. Think, for example, if you go back to Psalm 145 and verse 13. Think of the immediate context.

The verse begins with the words, Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and your dominion endures through all generations. Think then, with me for a moment, of the great power of God.

And his kingdom, far from being temporary, is eternal. The philosophies and kingdoms of our world last for decades, perhaps even centuries, but no longer.

Think of how the Roman Empire dominated the known world for over 500 years. Surely the people of the day thought that the power and the culture and the influence of Rome would never fall.

[11 : 25] But fall it did to be replaced by what we call the Dark Ages. 1500 years later, it was said that the sun never sets on the British Empire.

But set it has on the British Empire. The same is true of every prevailing philosophy. At the time of the Roman Empire, the most popular religion in the world was known as Mithraism.

Mithraism. It required the worship of bulls. We don't know much about Mithraism, and you've probably never heard of it before, because it's completely disappeared. Postmodernism, the prevailing philosophy of our day, will, in years to come, belong only in history books.

But the kingdom of God will endure through eternity, and his power will know no end. The kingdoms of men rise and fall. The philosophies of men rise and fall.

The religions of men rise and fall. But Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. That's a promise soon and certain. But as we look around at our seemingly chaotic world, and as we ourselves are sometimes up and sometimes down with our lockdown, we know that Christ is building his church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

[12 : 55] No weapon forced against us will stand. And all because God's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures through all generations.

Think also of the verse which immediately follows ours, which says of God, the Lord upholds all those who fall, and lifts up those who are bowed down.

Such faithfulness from the God whose kingdom is everlasting. How loving he is to all he has made, especially when those he has made are stumbling with exhaustion, and bowed down with loneliness, grief, and fear.

So we're going through those difficult times in life. We spoke about earlier when the promises of God become so precious to us. And when we're about to fall, he holds us up.

And when we're bowed down under the pressure, he lifts us up. The Lord of the covenant and his promises, the God besides which none compare, the God who's faithful to us, his primary interest is in picking us up and holding us up.

[14 : 14] You see, there's no boredom when we, in our best moments and our worst moments, have 10,000 promises of God to pray through and claim for ourselves.

He will even give us the faith with which to believe and to enjoy the promises that he's made to us. Boredom in prayer is a thing of the past.

We will never run out of things to pray about as long as we know the promises of God. We're going to sing a hymn now, a hymn which recognises our bowed downness, the pressure under which so many of us so often feel, and how God holds us up.

Dear Lord and Father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways.