

Do your homework.

Before you write it on a note card for your fridge, before you post it on Instagram or shop for it on a coffee mug or declare it your life verse, make a thorough study of where your promise lives in Scripture and in biblical history. Make sure it's a general promise, not a specific promise to someone else or just a general principle to observe. Check for any "ifs" that might change its application.

Check your motive.

If a promise in Scripture appeals to you, ask yourself why. What fear or need underlies your desire to claim that promise for yourself? What security are you looking for beyond the soul security guaranteed by Christ? Does claiming that promise help you submit to God's rule? Are you defining its fulfillment in terms of your own limited understanding? Would its fulfillment help you grow in godliness and humility?

And remember, the Bible is full of unambiguous promises from our triune God that we can celebrate with certainty. Here is a smattering of my favorites:

He promises to give us wisdom if we ask (James 1:5).

He promises to provide a way out of temptation (1 Cor. 10:13).

He promises that our salvation is secure, no matter what (John 10:28–29).

He promises to never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5).

He promises to finish the good work he has begun in us (Phil. 1:6).

He promises to come back (Luke 12:40)

These promises are sure and steadfast. Do you notice that they have much more to say about who God is or how he is sanctifying us than about a specific circumstance or outcome? We are not promised certainty in our circumstances, but we are promised certainty in the God of our circumstances. And that is an anchor for the soul.



Which Promises In the Bible Are for Me? - Jen Wilkin

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Not many things are more comforting than a promise made and kept. And not many things are more hurtful than a promise broken. Knowing we worship a God who keeps his promises is a source of deep joy. But misapplied, this knowledge can also lead us to treasure hunt Scripture for promises in problematic ways.

How can we know which promises are for us? How can we lay claim to the promises of the Bible without overstepping their application? Here are some common pitfalls to keep in mind as you study.

Common Mistakes

Confusing a promise with a principle.

Promises are always fulfilled 100 percent of the time. Principles state general truths. The book of Proverbs is often mistaken for a book of promises, when in fact it is a book of principles. The principle of “*train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it*” (Prov. 22:6) is generally true and wise to heed. But it is not a guarantee that every child raised with godly instruction will become a believer in Jesus.

Ignoring the context.

We often apply a promise to ourselves before considering its original audience or its historical, cultural, or textual context. In some cases, a promise was made to a specific person for a specific reason and has no further application beyond its immediate context. In other cases, the application can only be properly made after the promise is

understood in its original context. God’s promise to Abram of land and offspring (Gen. 12:1–3) cannot be taken to mean God will give me a house or children. It can, however, be applied to mean he will give me a spiritual inheritance through Christ.

Overlooking the “if.”

Promises that contain an “if” require some form of obedience before we can expect them to come to pass in our lives. They are conditional. If we want to claim them, we had better be ready to act in obedience to what they require. God grants us wisdom if we ask (James 1:4). But we have to ask. Often “if” promises of blessing are accompanied by corresponding “if” warnings about disobedience. We tend to celebrate God’s promises of blessing and sideline his promises of chastisement, though both point to a faithful God. It’s tough to find a coffee mug that sports Hebrews 12:6.

Which leads us to . . .

Choosing a promise selectively.

We tend to favor those promises that appeal to our own best-case scenario. We quote Exodus 14:14 in a crisis: “*The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.*” But we neglect to note that three chapters later in Exodus, Israel was commanded not to stand still, but to fight her enemies. In spiritual battles, sometimes we should stand still and sometimes we should fight. Better to ask God for wisdom as to which response is called for than to claim a promise that is not universally applicable.

Using a promise manipulatively.

Sometimes we employ a verse as a promise because we want God to act a certain way. Probably the most abused passage in this category is “*Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am with them*” (Matt. 18:20). Not only do we use it out of context, we also use it to try to coerce God into doing what we ask simply because we have gathered the requisite number of people to ask it. God’s promises to us should help us submit to his will, not bend him to ours.

Limiting a promise to your own understanding.

Even when we rightly recognize a promise as intended for us, we often impose our own understanding of exactly how it will be fulfilled. Or we are tempted to impose our own timeline on its fulfillment. Yes, God does have a plan to prosper you and not to harm you (Jer. 29:11), but as in the case of the people to whom those words were originally written, that “you” is more likely a collective reference to the body of believers, and that plan may play out across centuries in ways we can’t possibly predict. To recognize this intent does not diminish the beauty of the promise at all. It actually enhances it.

Avoiding the Pitfalls

So how can we avoid these promise claiming pitfalls? Our long-term strategy must be to move from spot knowledge of the Bible to comprehensive knowledge. In the short term, try these helps.