

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 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

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.