

**Q&A with Max Lucado, author of
*Unshakable Hope: Anchor Your Soul to the Promises of God***

Q: This new book examines twelve great heroes of the faith. What did you find they all have in common?

A: 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 biblical 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.

Q: So if we are "heirs of the promise," how do we access our inheritance?

A: Circumstances say, Cower to your fears. Your inheritance says otherwise: You are a child of the King. His perfect love casts out fear. Move forward. Haunting you are the kings of confusion. Thanks to them, you've struggled with your identity and destiny. You've bought the lie that life has no absolutes or purpose. Then you remember your inheritance: Truth. Guidance from God. His Word to instruct you. Is that to say all your challenges will disappear? They didn't for Joshua. He fought for seven years! But he knew more victory than defeat. So can you. It comes down to a simple decision to believe and receive your position as an heir of God and coheir with Christ. "In this world we are like Jesus" (1 John 4:17). We aren't slaves or distant relatives. Our inheritance is every bit as abundant as that of Jesus himself. What he receives, we receive.

Q: How does the sheer quantity of God's promises speak to the character of God?

A: 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! 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. 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.

Q: Why are so many people starving for hope?

A: We live in a day of despair. The suicide rate in America has increased 24 percent since 1999. 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 MSG).

Q: How do God's promises offer us a different perspective on life's problems?

A: When problems surface, People of the Promise 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. 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.

Q: How can we trust that God will keep his promises?

A: 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. 1) He is unchanging. He sees the end from the beginning. He's never caught off guard by the unexpected. He makes no midcourse corrections. He is not victimized by moods or weather. "He never changes or casts a shifting shadow" (James 1:17 NLT). 2) He is faithful. "God can be trusted to keep his promise" (Heb. 10:23 NLT). 3) He is strong. He does not overpromise and underdeliver. "God is able to do whatever he promises" (Rom. 4:21 NLT). 4) He cannot lie. "It is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18 NLT). 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 MSG).

Q: Human beings are made in the image of God. How does this affect our self-worth?

A: Pop psychology is wrong when it tells you to look inside yourself and find your value. The magazines are wrong when they suggest you are only as good as you are thin, muscular, pimple-free, or perfumed. The movies mislead you when they imply that your value increases as your stamina, intelligence, or net worth grows. Religious leaders lie when they urge you to grade your significance according to your church attendance, self-discipline, or spirituality.

According to the Bible you are good simply because God made you in his image. Period. He cherishes you because you bear a resemblance to him. And you will only be satisfied when you engage in your role as an image bearer of God. Such was the view of King David: "As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness" (Ps. 17:15 NKJV). Lay hold of this promise, and spare yourself a world of confusion and fear. How much sadness would evaporate if every person simply chose to believe this: I was made for God's glory and am being made into his image.

Q: How should "being made in God's image" impact how we treat other human beings?

A: Every person you see was created by God to bear his image and deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. This means *all* people deserve to be seen for who they are: image bearers of God. Imagine the impact this promise would have on the society that embraced it. What civility it would engender! What kindness it would foster! Racism will not flourish when people believe their neighbors bear God's image. The fire of feuds will have no fuel when people believe their adversaries are God's idea. Will a man abuse a woman? Not if he believes she bears the stamp of God. Will a boss neglect an employee? Not if she believes the employee bears a divine spark. Will society write off the indigent, the mentally ill, the inmate on

death row, or the refugee? Not if we believe, truly believe, that every human being is God's idea. And he has no bad ideas.

Q: If Satan has already been defeated, how do we respond to difficult circumstances?

A: Satan will not linger long where God is praised and prayers are offered. Satan may be vicious, but he will not be victorious. You will have reason to be anxious. The devil will seem to gain the upper hand. Some demon will intercept your dreams and destiny. All that is good will appear to lose. But you do not need to worry. You and I know the final score. The next time you smell his stinky breath, remind him of the promise he is loath to hear: "The God who brings peace will soon defeat Satan and give you power over him" (Rom. 16:20 NCV). It's a battle, so don't pack a picnic basket. Yet it is a battle God has won, so don't give the devil more than a passing glance.

Q: What part does prayer play in a life of unshakeable hope?

A: When God saved you, he enlisted you. He gave not only forgiveness for your past but also authority in the present and a role in the future. This life is on-the-job training for eternity. God is preparing you to reign with him in heaven. We are part of God's family. Ruling the universe is the family business. Our Father has a vested interest in ours. When you, as God's child, seek to honor the family business, God hears your requests. God hears these prayers as quickly as they are offered. Why? Because they come from his child. Will God do what you ask? Perhaps. Or perhaps he will do more than you imagined. He knows what is best. Stand firmly on this promise: "When a believing person prays, great things happen" (James 5:16 NCV). You are never without hope, because you are never without prayer.

Q: How do pride and arrogance hinder God's promises?

A: Simple. God resists the proud because the proud resist God. Arrogance stiffens the knee so it will not kneel, hardens the heart so it will not admit to sin. The heart of pride never confesses, never repents, never asks for forgiveness. Indeed, the arrogant never feel the need for forgiveness. Pride is the hidden reef that shipwrecks the soul. Pride not only prevents reconciliation with God; it prevents reconciliation with people. How many marriages have collapsed beneath the weight of foolish pride? How many apologies have gone unoffered due to the lack of humility? How many wars have sprouted from the rocky soil of arrogance? Pride comes at a high price. Don't pay it. Choose instead to stand on the offer of grace. "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5 NKJV). To the degree God hates arrogance, he loves humility. Humility is happy to do what pride will not. The humble heart is quick to acknowledge the need for God, eager to confess sin, willing to kneel before heaven's mighty hand.

Q: Scripture says God became flesh in Jesus. How does this fact reinforce our hope?

A: If you ever wonder if God understands you, he does. If you ever wonder if God listens, he does. If you ever wonder if the Uncreated Creator can, in a million years, comprehend the challenges you face, then ponder long and hard the promise of the incarnation. Jesus is "able to understand our weaknesses" (Heb. 4:15 NCV). The One who hears your prayers understands your pain. He never shrugs or scoffs or dismisses physical struggle. He had a human body. He gets you. So human he could touch his people. So mighty he could heal them. So human he spoke with an accent. So heavenly he spoke with authority. So human he could blend in unnoticed for thirty years. So mighty he could change history and be unforgotten for two thousand years. All man. Yet all God.

Q: What if I'm feeling insecure about my salvation? Where do I find a secure hope?

A: 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. 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.

Q: In what way is hope an anchor for our souls?

A: Your soul separates you from animals and unites you to God. And your soul needs an anchor. Your soul is fragile. It feels the pain of death and knows the questions of disease. Your liver may suffer from the tumor, but your soul suffers from the questions. Hence, your soul needs an anchor, a hooking point that is sturdier than the storm. This anchor is set, not on a boat or person or possession. No, this anchor is set in “the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf” (Heb. 6:19–20). Our anchor, in other words, is set in the very throne room of God. We might imagine the anchor attached to the throne itself. It will never break free. The rope will never snap. The anchor is set, and the rope is strong. Why? Because it is beyond the reach of the devil and under the care of Christ. Since no one can take your Christ, no one can take your hope. Death, failure, betrayal, sickness, disappointment—they cannot take your hope, because they cannot take your Jesus.

Q: How can a Christian apply God’s biblical promises to his or her own life?

A: The best book of promises is the one you and God are going to write together. Search and search until you find covenants that address your needs. Clutch them as the precious pearls they are; hide them in your heart so they can pay dividends long into the future. When the Enemy comes with his lies of doubt and fear, produce the pearl. Satan will be quickly silenced. He has no reply for truth. They work, friend. The promises of God work. They can walk you through horrific tragedies. They can buoy you in the day-to-day difficulties. They are, indeed, the great and precious promises of God. Build your life on the promises of God. Since his promises are unbreakable, your hope will be unshakable. The winds will still blow. The rain will still fall. But in the end you will be standing—standing on the promises of God.

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