

SERMON PRACTICES

Christmas: Promises Fulfilled Week Two - Walking With Promises

Welcome, we're delighted you've chosen to dig more deeply into the Scriptures and consider what God has for you through this sermon. These sermon practices are ideally intended to be discussed with others, so find a friend, family member, or roommate to join you. If you haven't yet joined a life group yet, check out our website at vchurch.org/groups or stop at the Welcome Center for more info.

Getting Started

Before you start today's study, be sure you take a moment to sit quietly before the Lord, then have one person pray, asking the Holy Spirit to give you all deep insight into the Scriptures and the ability to receive his teaching and direction in your time together.

Introduction: Walking with Promises

When God makes a promise, what do we do?

Mary responded by moving forward. She was given word from the angel about Jesus, a promise to birth the Son of God. Then to confirm the impossible was possible, the angel also shared that her older cousin, Elizabeth, was pregnant despite her age. So Mary immediately went to see her cousin to investigate what the messenger had said. She trekked the almost 100-mile journey through rough terrain, while she was in the early stages of pregnancy, to see the promises fulfilled in her cousin. In short, she received a promise from God, and then she took action; she walked with her promises. I wonder what her conversations with God must have been like throughout her journey to see Elizabeth. I imagine her time was spent processing her fear and worry, but also declaring the promises that she knew God had given her.

How do you walk with the promises of God? How do you journey with them?

Talking to God about His promises is a key component to "walk with promises" like Mary did. This type of prayer is called Intercession. It is our time to sit with God in the middle of the journey, before we have all the answers. We intercede to declare promises, to process where we're at in the journey, to ask for help, and to trust God's leadership. During this practice, we join with Jesus in advocating that God's will be done "on earth as it is in heaven." We pray for Him to move in the lives and circumstances of those we love and those in our community. Sometimes, this means that we keep praying or even wrestle with God in prayer until we see the outcome that we desire (this special type of long term intercessory prayer is called contending.) It doesn't mean that we always get what we want. But if we believe prayer really moves the hand of God, then we can act on that belief by expressing our healthy desires and trusting that God will hear and respond in kind.

What does it mean to intercede in prayer?

In this practice, you will bring people and circumstances before God and then wait. Yes, wait. We wait on the Holy Spirit to help us see how to pray about these things. We want to know how God wants us to pray because His will is good; it is heaven coming to earth – life over death, healing over sickness, freedom over bondage, and so on. So, we identify what we want to contend for, and then we make space. We ask the Spirit to quiet our perspectives and desires since they are only a part of God's whole picture, and we allow Him to show us more of that bigger picture. It's in this space that we boldly pray, "Your will be done" (Matt. 6v10).

Practice: Prayer Cards

This practice isn't easy, but it's worth it. Interceding requires faith, persistence, and boldness. It asks us to pray with confidence in God's goodness and power, even if we never see the fruit of our prayers. We have to believe in his ability to heal and restore what's broken, not only to patch things up but to ultimately redeem them. When we believe and intercede, we get to be part of the miracles that happen, freedom given, and lives rescued and changed forever!

- 1. Put away any distractions and take out a few note cards.** On your first card, list a circumstance or person where you desire to see God radically move. This will be your prayer card. Repeat for every individual circumstance or person that comes to mind. We recommend starting with a maximum of three cards.
 - Consider these circumstances as you make your cards: Any illness, financial needs, etc? Any relationships in need of healing - estranged family, friendships, marriages, etc? Any struggles in need of freedom - addiction, bondage, habitual sin, etc?
- 2. Get into a comfortable (but alert) position and ask the Holy Spirit to come and teach you to pray.** Just spend a minute or two in silence.
 - As you sit, let your mind calm down. Try to gently slow your breathing, take a few deep breaths, and do your best to release any tension. Let go of any expectations and just spend a few moments "being" with God.
- 3. After a few minutes of silence, read through these truths.** As you do, thank God that they're true:

*God is your Father; He has good intentions toward you
and cares about your life - things small and big*

*God is in heaven, and we can access heaven here, now,
as close as the air up against your skin*

God hears your prayers, and they really do make a difference

- 4. Now pray through your prayer card(s)**
 - Sit with the card and invite the Holy Spirit to speak about the circumstances and people you are journeying with him on these cards. Ask him what he wants you to know about what's on the card.
 - Write down one or two promises of God that correlate to the circumstance or person listed on the card (If you need a list of promises of God, see week one's practice).
 - Throughout the week, sit down with your cards and track progress by writing updates on the backside of the card.
 - Reassess the card and if there are any changes to the prayer or scripture that God is guiding you to make.
- 5. Repeat the process through your other prayer card(s)**
- 6. Take your cards and share them with your life group or a few people you are close with.** Pray and encourage one another and continue to include each other on your journey of walking with the promises of God.