

## HOLDING GOD'S PROMISES

Back in 1921, a missionary couple named David and Svea Flood went from Sweden to the heart of Africa to what was then called the Belgian Congo. They met up with another young Scandinavian couple, the Ericksons, and the four of them sought God for direction. In those days of much tenderness and devotion and sacrifice, they felt led of the Lord to set out from the main mission station and take the gospel to a remote area.

This was a huge step of faith. At the village they were rebuffed by the chief, who would not let them enter his town for fear of alienating the local gods. The two couples opted to go half a mile up the slope and build their own mud huts'. They prayed for a spiritual breakthrough, but there was none. The only contact with the villagers was a young boy, who was allowed to sell them chickens and eggs twice a week. Svea Flood-a tiny woman only four feet, eight inches tall-decided that if this was the only African she could talk to, she would try to lead the boy to Jesus. And in fact, she succeeded. But there were no other encouragements. Meanwhile, malaria continued to strike one member of the little band after another. In time the Ericksons decided they had had enough suffering and left to return to the central mission station. David and Svea Flood remained near the village alone.

Then, of all things, Svea found herself pregnant in the middle of the primitive wilderness. When the time came for her to give birth, the village chief softened enough to allow a midwife to help her. A little girl was born, whom they named Aina. The delivery, however, was exhausting, and Svea Flood was already weak from bouts of malaria. The birth process was a heavy blow to her stamina. She lasted only another seventeen days. Inside David Flood, something snapped in that moment. He dug a crude grave, buried his twenty-seven-year-old wife, and then took his daughter back down the mountain to the mission station. Giving his newborn daughter to the Ericksons, he snarled, "I'm going back to Sweden. I've lost my wife, and I obviously can't take care of this baby. God has ruined my life." With that, he headed for the port, rejecting not only his calling, but God himself. Within eight months both the Ericksons were stricken with a mysterious malady and died within days of each other.

This couple wanted to serve God and yet it seemed that everything they worked for was in vain. Have you ever felt like that? Perhaps you have asked the question about the situation you are currently in:  
How can anything good come from this death?  
How can anything good come from my sickness?  
How can anything good come from rape or abuse?

Today we are continuing in our 3 week series entitled 'Disappointed'. Last week we talked about being disappointed with God's presence. This week I want to talk about being disappointed with God's plan. If God is all powerful and He is good then why do we face all these problems?

Romans 8:28 says, "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God: those who are called according to His purpose."

I don't have all the answers, but I know this passage is a promise. Like a hand holding on to yours with 5 fingers let me suggest that there are 5 things this passage says about the promises of God:

1. His Promises are CERTAIN - we know

Num 23:19 God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

There are many things in life that I do not know. I do not know I am financially secure. I do not know how or when I will die. I do not know if my children will outlive me.

We live in a world of uncertainty. There are so many things that are beyond our control. Without God in the equation all you have is a runaway train with no hope. For the person who trusts in God, uncertainty is not a problem because we know that God is in control: that is our confidence! We KNOW that God is faithful.

2 Cor 1:20 For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

It was a custom, which passed over from the synagogues to the Christian assemblies, that when a person had read a passage of scripture or prayed to God, the others responded Amen, and thus made the substance of what was uttered their own. The word "amen" is an interesting word. It was transliterated directly from the Hebrew into Greek and then into Latin and into English and many other languages, so that it is practically a universal word. It has been called the best known word in human speech. The word is related to - in fact, almost identical - to the Hebrew word for "trust" (AMAN), or faithfulness. Thus, it came to mean "sure" or "truly", an expression of absolute trust and confidence.

The promises of God are AMEN. They can be trusted. Trust is something that is earned. It is gained by experience over time. Let me ask you, have you found God to be faithful in your life?

When I was a kid we had a pond close to our house. I remember the first winter it froze over. At first I was unsure if I could walk on it or not. I just reached out my toe to touch the ice and then pulled it away quickly. Then I ventured out onto it gently – unsure if it would hold my weight. Soon I was walking normally and jumping up and down on it. Later cars were driven out onto it. The more I experienced it the more I trusted it to support me and the bolder I became. The same is true of God. The more we put our faith in Him the more we understand of His faithfulness.

Sometimes a political candidate who wishes to be returned to office will say, "I stand on my record." Our faith stands on the record of what God has done, on the record of the promises He has kept.

In the second book of The Chronicles of Narnia, Prince Caspian, Lucy enters Narnia again, and she hasn't seen Aslan (the lion who represents Christ) for a long time, and so they have a wonderful reunion. Lucy says to him "Aslan, you're bigger now." Aslan says, "Lucy, that's because you are older. You see, Lucy, every year that you grow, you will find me bigger." Hasn't that been the case for many of us? Every year we grow, we find him bigger in grace, goodness and faithfulness and in those promises that he has given us upon which we can depend all the days of our lives.

## 2. His Promises are COMPLETE - all things

It says here that ALL THINGS work together for good. This means everything that you have ever experienced and everything you ever will experience. Sometimes as Christians we can see how some things work together for good but not others. Our joy as believers is in the knowledge that God is sovereign in everything and that He is in control.

Proverbs 16:4 says, "The Lord has prepared everything for His purpose - even the wicked for the day of disaster."

Not only is God faithful, we know that He is good. A passage that has brought me great comfort over the years is Gen 18:25;

Gen 18:25 Far be it from you to do such a thing -- to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

We may not understand what God is doing but we know that He is faithful and He is good and so that should be enough for us. We can trust Him. One of the characters in the Bible where we see this truth is Job. Though he went through a lot of very difficult trials in his life. In the end we see that God was still in control.

Job 1: 9 Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing? 10 Haven't You placed a hedge around him, his household, and everything he owns? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions are spread out in the land. 11 But stretch out Your hand and strike everything he owns, and he will surely curse You to Your face." 12 "Very well," the LORD told Satan, "everything he owns is in your power. However, you must not lay a hand on Job himself." So Satan went out from the LORD's presence."

God allowed Satan, the Sabaeans, the Chaldeans, a lightning storm, and a powerful wind to completely destroy Job's life. He even let Satan take Job's health. Why? At the end of Job we see that everything, even his suffering, had a purpose:

Job 42:5 says, "I had heard rumors about You, but now my eyes have seen You."

After Job experienced God and understood His sovereignty, Job's relationship with God became personal! There was nothing, not even Satan, which was beyond God's control for good in Job's life. All things includes the sin of others and even our own sins. All things means that there is nothing which falls outside of God's control and which works contrary to our good.

Laura Story wrote a song called blessings;

*We pray for wisdom, Your voice to hear, And we cry in anger when we cannot feel You near  
We doubt Your goodness, we doubt Your love, As if every promise from Your Word is not enough  
All the while, You hear each desperate plea, And long that we'd have faith to believe  
Cause what if Your blessings come through raindrops, What if Your healing comes through tears  
What if a thousand sleepless nights Are what it takes to know You're near  
And what if trials of this life are Your mercies in disguise  
When friends betray us, When darkness seems to win  
We know the pain reminds this heart That this is not, this is not our home*

3. His Promises are COLLECTIVE - work together

Notice that this verse does not say that everything IS good. It says that everything WORKS TOGETHER FOR good. There is a difference. Lots of stuff that happens to us in life is not good – it is evil. Taken alone, suffering is bad but the promise is that even evil can bring about good when seen in the bigger picture. The things that happened in the life of Joseph were wrong but when everything came together it was used for good by God to save the nation of Israel.

Gen 50:20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Taken individually, the events and circumstances God allows may not, in and of themselves, appear to be of any value or good to the Christian. But Paul does not say that each event is good or even that each incident will produce that which is good. He informs us that all of the events, working together, produce what is good.

Have you ever made a cake? The ingredients which go into a cake are not very tasty when eaten individually. Flour, sugar, shortening, eggs, salt, baking powder, and spices are not something we want to eat one ingredient at a time. But mix all of these together in just the right proportions, and then bake the combined mixture, and you have a delicious treat. Each event in our life is like one ingredient in a cake. It may not seem good, by itself, but when mixed by God with other correct events, it will surely produce what is good.

You may not like what's going into your life right now, because you are tasting the ingredients individually. God knows the recipe and He is creating a wonderful masterpiece with your life.

#### 4. His Promises are CONSTRUCTIVE - for the good

All things work together for GOOD. The end result in your life will be blessing. That's the promise – that everything will work out in the end. God loves you and has your best interests in mind. Although you may only see the negative now, someday you will see the good.

I love the way Joni Erekson-Tada put it: “Every sorrow we taste will one day prove to be the best possible thing that could have happened. We will thank God endlessly in heaven for the trials He sent us here. This is not Disneyland — this is truth.” And that from a woman who has suffered in a wheelchair for more than 30 years.

I don't want to minimize pain and suffering, but sometimes a long-term perspective is important. Paul, suffered through beatings, stoning, shipwrecks, imprisonment, rejection, hunger, thirst, homelessness and far more pain that most of us will ever have to endure. Five different times he was scourged and three times he was beaten by rods. These are his words:

2 Cor 4:17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

British church leader Galvin Reid tells about meeting where a young man who had fallen down some stairs at the age of one and had shattered his back. He had been in and out of hospitals his whole life — and yet he made the astounding comment that he thinks God is fair. Reid asked him, “How old are you?” The boy said, “Seventeen.” “How many years have you spend in hospitals?” he asked. The boy said, “Thirteen years.” The pastor said, “And you think that is fair?” The boy replied: “Well, God has all eternity to make it up to me.”

Rom 8:18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. 19 The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.

One Christian who lived a life full of pain said: “In light of heaven, the worst suffering on earth, a life full of the most atrocious tortures on the planet, will be seen to be no more serious than one night in an inconvenient hotel.”

Think of it this way. Let's say that on the first day of 2010, you had a terrible day. You had a painful root canal at the dentist. You crashed your car. Your stock portfolio took a nosedive. Your spouse got sick. A friend betrayed you. From start to finish it was like the title of that children's book: *Alexander & the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*. But then every other day of the year was wonderful. A friend wins the lottery and gives you \$1 million. You get promoted at work to your dream job. Time magazine puts your color photo on its cover as "The Person of the Year." Your marriage is idyllic, your health is fabulous, you have a three-month vacation. Then next New Year's Day someone asks, "So, how was your year?" You'd say, "It was great!" The bad day would be forgotten in light of the good days. E.g. child birth. And they'd say, "But didn't it start out bad? Didn't you go through a lot of trouble that first."

Sometimes we are given the opportunity to see the good. Other times we will not and it is only revealed to us in heaven.

5. His Promises are **CONDITIONAL** - those who love God ... called to his purpose

The last truth about the promises of God is that they are conditional. All things work together for good only when they are part of God's plan. If you don't have a personal relationship with Christ then the end is not good and the path is not pleasant. If you remove God from the equation everything changes.

Let me finish the story of Svea Flood I started with. After the death of the Ericksons the little baby was then turned over to some American missionaries, who adjusted her Swedish name from Aina to "Aggie" and eventually brought her back to the United States at age three.

This family loved the little girl and were afraid that if they tried to return to Africa, some legal obstacle might separate her from them. So they decided to stay in their home country and switch from missionary work to pastoral ministry. And that is how Aggie grew up in South Dakota. As a young woman, she attended North Central Bible College in Minneapolis. There she met and married a young man named Dewey Hurst.

Years passed. The Hursts enjoyed a fruitful Ministry. Aggie gave birth first to a daughter, then a son. In time her husband became president of a Christian college in the Seattle area, and Aggie was intrigued to find so much Scandinavian heritage there. One day a Swedish religious magazine appeared in her mailbox. She had no idea who had sent it, and of course she couldn't read the words. But as she turned the pages, all of a sudden a photo stopped her cold. There in a primitive setting was a grave with a white cross-and on the cross were the words **SVEA FLOOD**. Aggie jumped in her car and went straight for a college faculty member who, she knew, could translate the article. "What does this say?" she demanded. The instructor summarized the story: It was about missionaries who had come to a village long ago ... the birth of a white baby ... the death of the young mother ... the one little African boy who had been led to Christ ... and how, after the whites had all left, the boy had grown up and finally persuaded the chief to let him build a school in the village. The article said that gradually he won all his students to Christ... the children led their parents to Christ... even the chief had become a Christian. Today there were six hundred Christian believers in that one village.... All because of the sacrifice of David and Svea Flood.

For the Hursts' twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, the college presented them with the gift of a vacation to Sweden. There Aggie sought to find her real father. An old man now, David Flood had remarried, fathered four more children, and generally dissipated his life with alcohol. He had recently suffered a

stroke. Still bitter, he had one rule in his family: "Never mention the name of God - because God took everything from me." After an emotional reunion with her half brothers and half sister, Aggie brought up the subject of seeing her father. The others hesitated. "You can talk to him," they replied, "even though he's very ill now. But you need to know that whenever he hears the name of God, he flies into a rage. Aggie was not to be deterred. She walked into the squalid apartment, with liquor bottles everywhere, and approached the seventy-three-year-old man lying in a rumpled bed. "Papa~" she said tentatively. He turned and began to cry. "Aina," he said. "I never meant to give you away." "It's all right, Papa," she replied, taking him gently in her arms. "God took care of me." The man instantly stiffened. The tears stopped. "God forgot all of us. Our lives have been like this because of Him." He turned his face back to the wall. Aggie stroked his face and then continued, undaunted. "Papa, I've got a little story to tell you, and it's a true one. You didn't go to Africa in vain. Mama didn't die in vain. The little boy you won to the Lord grew up to win that whole village to Jesus Christ. The one seed you planted just kept growing and growing. Today there are six hundred African people serving the Lord because you were faithful to the call of God in your life. ... Papa, Jesus loves you. He has never hated you." The old man turned back to look into his daughter's eyes. His body relaxed. He began to talk. And by the end of the afternoon, he had come back to the God he had resented for so many decades. Over the next few days, father and daughter enjoyed warm moments together. Aggie and her husband soon had to return to America-and within a few weeks, David Flood had gone into eternity.

A few years later, the Hursts were attending an evangelism conference in London, England, when a report was given from the nation of Zaire (the former Belgian Congo). The superintendent of the national church, representing some 110,000 baptized believers, spoke eloquently of the gospel's spread in his nation. Aggie could not help going to ask him afterward if he had ever heard of David and Svea Flood. "Yes, madam," the man replied in French, his words then being translated into English. "It was Svea Flood who led me to Jesus Christ. I was the boy who brought food to your parents before you were born. In fact, to this day your mother's grave and her memory are honored by all of us." He embraced her in a long, sobbing hug. Then he continued, "You must come to Africa to see, because your mother is the most famous person in our history." In time that is exactly what Aggie Hurst and her husband did. They were welcomed by cheering throngs of villagers. She even met the man who had been hired by her father many years before to carry her back down the mountain in a hammock-cradle.

The most dramatic moment, of course, was when the pastor escorted Aggie to see her mother's white cross for herself. She knelt in the soil to pray and give thanks. Later that day, in the church, the pastor read from John 12:24: "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." He then followed with Psalm 126:5: "Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy."

All things work together for the good of those who love God: those who are called according to His purpose. This is God's promise to each one of us. Maybe you are here today and you still do not understand how God can bring good out of pain. I pray that God will reveal His will to you in time. Until then, grab this promise and hold on tight. Put your hand in God's and trust in Him.