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Description automatically generatedPrayer and Praise Service**

**August 14, 2024**

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On Sundays we are going *To the Mountain with God.* So, on Wednesday nights through the remainder of August and September during Prayer and Praise we will be standing in the valley between two mountains. We will look back at the summit we visited last Sunday and then look ahead to the summit we will visit this Sunday. We will do that in various ways as we also spend time in prayer. For those of you who will be in other groups on Wednesdays, if you would like the notes from Prayer and Praise to have your own time in the valley of prayer between Sundays, I will be posting my notes under the news section of our website.

Prayer is vital. But Stephen Olford once said, “Prayerlessness is the most evident and endemic sin in our religious life.”[[1]](#endnote-1) It’s rather disturbing to realize that neglecting prayer is sin! But that is because prayer is vital to our relationship with God and, therefore, our own spiritual health and the spiritual health of our church. So, whether you join us in Prayer and Praise or not, be sure you make time to pray.

Even the brief years of the earthly ministry of Jesus were permeated with prayer. One message in the *To the Mountain with God* series will deal with how Jesus often went alone to pray.

“The greater the task, the greater the intensity with which [Jesus] prayed. On some occasions He quietly slipped away to a place of communion with the Father. And other times the tremendous burdens of His ministry required that He send His followers away so He could gain precious moments for intercession. Our Lord prayed before the cross, on the cross, and after His resurrection. And even now a significant aspect of our eternal salvation rests upon the fact that “He always lives to make intercession” (Heb. 7:25).[[2]](#endnote-2)

I love what Tom Elliff says in his book *A Passion for Prayer*, “Jesus wasted no words or motions; the priorities of His life were established through prayer.”[[3]](#endnote-3) That must be true for us as well. If you seek God in prayer, He will align your priorities according to His will. And when that happens, you will find true satisfaction and be far more at peace.

**LOOKING BACK AT MOUNT ZION**

As we stand in the valley tonight, we look back to Mount Zion. There was one thing I want to explore a little deeper from Sunday. That is presuming upon God.

On Sunday I said we should always have faith in God for protection but never presume upon God for that protection. That lesson comes from Israel’s history.

As the historical books indicate, Israel grew presumptuous about God’s protection of Jerusalem. They reasoned that if God was in the city, then He would not allow anything to happen to it, no matter how they behaved. They should have known better, though, since, at the temple’s dedication, Solomon made it clear that God does not really live in the temple saying, “The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!”[[4]](#endnote-4)

The prophets saw what was to come because of the people’s presumption. Jeremiah highlighted their presumption in his temple sermon in Jeremiah 7.

**Jeremiah 7:3-5, 7-8**  This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. 4 Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!" 5 If you really change your ways and your actions . . . 7 then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever. 8 But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.

Ezekiel described God’s abandonment of the temple in Ezekiel 9-11 on the eve of the building’s destruction by the Babylonians. The temple was destroyed in 586/7 BC by the Babylonians.

After Jerusalem was devastated and the temple destroyed, the author of Lamentations, who we think was Jeremiah, bemoans the sad condition of the city even alluding to Psalm 48:

All who pass your way clap their hands at you;

They scoff and shake their heads at daughter Jerusalem:

“Is this the city that was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth?” (Lamentations 2:15)

Of course, the temple was rebuilt some decades later, after the Persians allowed a return of the Exiles to Jerusalem. That temple was greatly expanded early in the first century by King Herod. But this temple too was demolished in AD 70 by the Romans.[[5]](#endnote-5)

God protects His people, and we should have faith that He will. But we should never presume upon God that everything will be safe in Zion, and we can just do whatever we want. Our faith *in* God must be demonstrated by faithfulness *to* God.

This is an important lesson for our day. Many American Christians are not unlike the Israelites. We have enjoyed the blessing of worship and living in a nation that in the 1950’s adopted “In God We Trust” as the national motto and put it on everything from the wall above the Speaker’s rostrum in the U.S. House of Representatives Chamber in Washington to our money. But our display of the motto in our lives has not always been as clear as our display in print and stone. Like the Israelites, many American Christians have chased after other gods. We have climbed several Mount Zaphons instead of Mount Zion. Our pastimes and pursuit of money have taken our focus away from God often filling our calendars so that God is pushed out of our daily schedule and our sabbath. We have presumed upon God. We reason, “We are good people. We are even Christians. We live in a God-fearing, if not Christian nation. God will take care of us.” Yet, all the while, we have not lived like our trust is in God. Our stadiums are far more filled than our churches. We spend far more of our money and time on our hobbies or our kids’ activities than we give to God in devotion and service. Yet, we expect the blessings of God and wonder why the church has so little voice – and is even laughed at – in our culture today. God will not bless that which is not devoted to Him. And culture will not listen to a voice that has no substance to it. Substance comes from faithfulness to God which builds a genuine testimony for God.

Few people in the last century enjoyed the prominence Billy Graham did. Billy Graham had the ear of everyone from people in prominence to people in obscurity. Why? Because his Christian testimony was solid. Billy Graham wasn’t perfect. His wife Ruth said she had never considered divorce, but she had considered murder! But Billy Graham was faithful. And faithfulness is vital to build a testimony. Therefore, even people who were not believers listened to him and respected him.

We, as the people of God, must pursue God with everything we have. We must go to the mountain with Him daily in private devotion and we must go to the mountain with Him corporately each week in corporate worship. We must be faithful so that we can experience all the good things God wants to do in and through us. We must never presume upon God.

As we stand in the valley and look back to Mount Zion, let’s enter a:

**SEASON OF PRAYER**

* Confess and repent of any presumption you have made upon God.
* Ask the Lord to fill your life with His presence as you seek him.
* Ask him to help you discipline yourself to go to the mountain with Him daily and to prioritize time with Him at church weekly.
* Pray for others you know who need that discipline and priority in their lives.
* Thank God that He will give you success as you seek Him.

**LOOKING TO THE NEXT SUMMIT**

This Sunday we turn our attention to the mountains of Ararat, where Noah’s ark landed as the flood waters receded. We will focus on Genesis 8 through 9:17. I encourage you to read ahead because it is a long passage, and we will not be able to cover everything on Sunday.

As we look ahead to the summit, I want you to begin thinking about this: how have you experienced the promises of God in your life?

Within the pages of the Bible there are anywhere from 3,000 to 30,000 promises mentioned. It depends on whose number you look at as to how many there are – and some are rather confident (hear in that “arrogant”) about their number. I’m not going to take the time to count, so let’s just agree that there are a lot. In fact, since the numbers range so widely, I would suggest that the promises of God are too numerous to count, so maybe we shouldn’t even try!

George Mueller lived in the 1800s and was a man of prayer. A missionary, pastor, author, and evangelist, Mueller is best known for his work establishing and overseeing several orphanages where he cared for 10,024 children during his lifetime. Mueller also establish 117 schools which offered Christian education to more than 120,000 students. And he did it all through prayer. Earlier in life he had determined to never ask for money, but to bring his needs to God and allow God to meet those needs. If you have never read his diary, you should. There he records God’s daily, sometimes hourly, provision. Mueller’s faith and trust in God was enormouse.

One reason Mueller had such confidence in prayer was because he believed the promises of God. In his book, *The Book of Bible Promises*, Mueller reminds us that, “God’s promises are . . . based on His immutable nature. The Bible says that “God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” (Num. 23:19).”[[6]](#endnote-6) Mueller goes on in his book to collect various promises from the Bible under key categories for life – everything from assurance to fear to reconciliation to worry. Mueller writes:

God’s promises are priceless and invaluable. They are comforting to the soul and encouraging to the heart. Promises such as “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9) and “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the LORD upholds him with His hand” (Psalm 37:23-24) bring comfort and encouragement to our hearts.”[[7]](#endnote-7)

Because God’s promises are so precious we are to treat God’s promises with reverence and respect. Mueller writes:

The Bible says that we should “not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:12).[[8]](#endnote-8)

One man we should imitate is Noah. Noah was the only righteous man in the world at the time of the flood. Can you imagine? You think things are bad now, things were awful then. **Genesis 6:5** says that every inclination of the thoughts of people’s hearts was only evil all the time! Therefore, God decided he would wipe mankind from the face of the earth – and, while he was at it, he would wipe out all the animals and other creatures as well! BUT – **Genesis 6:8**  “*But Noah* found favor in the eyes of the LORD.” **Genesis 6:9**  “. . . Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.”

Because Noah lived this way God called him to an enormous task – to build an ark that would be the vessel of salvation for a remnant of people and animals through whom God would reboot creation.

And Noah did what God said. He built a gigantic boat in a place where there was no water upon which to float it, facing criticism from his peers – oh, and did I mention it took as long as 75 years to build the ark?[[9]](#endnote-9) Can you imagine the criticism, the “crazy old Noah” jokes?

Nevertheless, Noah did what God told Him to do. And when it was all said and done, Noah received one of the greatest promises of God – **READ Genesis 9:8-17**. This covenantal promise to Noah was a unilateral unconditional covenant, meaning that no matter what happened and how bad the world got, God would keep this promise and never again destroy the earth by a flood. God made a way for that promise to be repeated all over the world at several places on any given day for all time – the rainbow. Whenever you see a rainbow, you can remember God made a promise, and He’s kept it.

Mark Twain and one of his friends stepped out of church just as a violent rainstorm began. Looking at the sky, Twain’s friend remarked, “I wonder if it will stop.” Twain replied, “It always has.” He was right; it always has stopped raining! Why? Because God made a covenant, and he always keeps his word.[[10]](#endnote-10)

3,000 promises? 30,000 promises? However many there are, they have all been kept or are being kept by our Lord.

As we conclude, think about a promise God has made that you hold especially dear. As we pray, thank God for that promise.

[Access a free eBook of Mueller’s *The Book of Bible Promises* [HERE](https://www.georgemuller.org/uploads/4/8/6/5/48652749/the_book_of_bible_promises.pdf).]

1. In Tom Elliff, *A Passion for Prayer*, 9. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Elliff, 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Elliff, 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. 1 Kings 8:27 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Largely quotes from Longman, 212-213. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Mueller, *The Book of Bible Promises,* 6. https://www.georgemuller.org/uploads/4/8/6/5/48652749/the\_book\_of\_bible\_promises.pdf [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Mueller, 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Mueller, 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. https://answersingenesis.org/bible-timeline/how-long-did-it-take-for-noah-to-build-the-ark/?gad\_source=1&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIvLuHyuHvhwMViBKtBh2yri\_LEAAYASAAEgKYW\_D\_BwE [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Warren Wiersbe, *Be Basic*, 120. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)