

Consequences for Sin

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” (Genesis 3:15)

Scripture: Genesis 3:14–20

Song: “Standing on the Promises”

I read the passage of Scripture listed on my assignment and wrinkled my nose. God’s promises *again*? I’ve been writing devotions for 10 years, and it’s common for certain themes to repeat, but for every week of devotionals I write, at least one passage is about God fulfilling His promises. I was running out of ideas for anecdotes I hadn’t used yet! “Lord,” I groaned, “Why do you have to be so consistent?” I immediately laughed at myself and changed my prayer. “Thank You, Lord, that You so consistently fulfill Your promises!”

God fulfilling His promises is a frequent theme in the Bible. Some promises were fulfilled right away, and some took time—like today’s promise to Adam and Eve. As a consequence for their sin, Eve’s offspring would be enemies of Satan, but God promised that one of Eve’s descendants would crush the devil’s head. That promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ when He died for our sins and rose again, breaking the power of sin and death. Take a minute to list God’s promises to you and thank the Lord for His faithfulness.

Father, thank You for having a plan from the very beginning to redeem me and for promising me eternal life through Christ my Lord. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

July 20–26. **Katherine Robles** is the author of Christian romance novels, the mother of four sons, and a special education teacher in Delaware.

Spiritual Family

“Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mark 3:35)

Scripture: Mark 3:31–35; Luke 11:27–28

Song: “Blest Be the Tie That Binds”

John Fawcett became a Baptist minister in 1765 at the age of 26. He pastored a small church in Yorkshire, England, for a few years, but it didn’t pay much, and his family was growing. When he was offered a higher-paying job at a large, popular church in London in 1772, he accepted gladly, even though he and his family loved their local church family.

On the day of the move, John preached a farewell sermon while movers emptied his home and piled his family’s belongings into wagons for the trip. After the service, the men and women of the village crowded around John and his family to express their love for them and to say how much they would miss them. John’s wife finally burst into tears and told her husband that she didn’t know how they could leave. John felt the same, and they decided to stay. A few days later John wrote the hymn “Blest Be the Tie That Binds.” He lived and served in that small village for the rest of his life.

As Jesus said, God’s family is made up of everyone who does God’s will. Our blood relationships and worldly connections are not as important as the bond we have in Jesus Christ. Take time today to pray for your brothers and sisters in Christ and look for ways to encourage and serve them.

Father, thank You for making me part of your eternal family. I praise You for being my loving Father. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Meditating on God's Law

Your commands are always with me and make me wiser than my enemies. (Psalm 119:98)

Scripture: Psalm 119:97–104

Song: “Thy Word”

In our church, bridal showers include a short talk or devotional along with the presents, snacks, and games. We've had wonderful talks on the roles of men and women in marriage, agape love, homemaking, and the future wedding feast of the Lamb. A few years ago, I was asked to speak at a friend's shower. I began by announcing, “We're going to talk about fighting biblically. Put your dukes up!” As every head swiveled my way, I could tell my words weren't what people were expecting!

Disagreements are a part of marriage. There's no way to live with someone you love and avoid all conflict. Fortunately, the Bible is a good guide for handling conflict. It teaches us how to forgive, how to speak the truth in love, how to test our motivations, how to put others' needs above our own, and how to listen and be slow to anger.

I love the Bible. It teaches us to be more like Jesus and shows us how to live in a way that is worthy of our Lord. It makes us wise, gives us understanding, keeps us from evil paths, and brings us joy. Praise the Lord for His holy Word.

Father, Your Word is sweeter than honey and a lamp unto my feet. Please help me to understand it better and to meditate on it daily. Keep my feet from evil paths and make me wise. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Mary: the Lord's Servant

“For no word from God will ever fail.” (Luke 1:37)

Scripture: Luke 1:26–38

Song: “Great Is Thy Faithfulness“

When God called Chaminda and his wife, Janani, to plant churches in southern Sri Lanka, they knew they would face persecution from the area's Buddhist majority. Landlords evicted them frequently, then the 2004 tsunami destroyed the community where they lived. It also brought foreign Christians who helped Chaminda purchase a piece of land with an old house he could turn into a church. Local Buddhist monks stirred up a mob 1,000 people strong who beat Chaminda and damaged the building.

During legal proceedings related to the attack, Chaminda and Janani were not allowed to live on the property. They prayed and continued to meet for church in members' homes. For five years the abandoned property became home to drug addicts and homeless criminals. When the case finally ended, the community welcomed Chaminda and Janani back to live on their property. Persecution did not end there, but the church grew on the property as planned.

Sometimes it's hard to see how God is going to accomplish what He says He will do. A tsunami and a mob are destructive forces, but God used them to open the door for His church to be established and welcomed in an area of spiritual darkness. Mary didn't see how God could turn a virgin into a mother, but as His servant, she trusted Him to fulfil His word and bring Christ's light to a world of spiritual darkness.

Father, thank You that Your Word never fails. I praise You and trust You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Keepsakes and Treasures

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. (Luke 2:16)

Scripture: Luke 2:15–19

Song: “Hark the Herald Angels Sing”

Last year my mother had open heart surgery. The surgery went well, and my father gave my siblings and I daily updates of her first couple weeks of recovery, but Mom asked for no visitors. Finally, I was able to visit her in person. She was tired but happy to see me and showed me her scars. “It’s funny,” she said at one point. “Your siblings all wanted to come see me too. Why is that? To make sure I’m still here?” We laughed, but she was onto something. My siblings and I read Dad’s updates. We believed Dad’s updates. We knew that she was okay, and yet seeing her alive and well with my own eyes filled me with extra joy that knowledge couldn’t.

The shepherds heard the angels’ report about the newborn king Jesus and believed it, but they still wanted to go see the baby Savior for themselves. They hurried down dark streets, searching, and when they found Him, when they saw Him with their own eyes, they were filled with extra joy. Seeing the Christ gave them confidence to tell everyone they met about the angels and the newborn Messiah.

This is why testifying about what Christ has done in our lives is so important. Our testimony is what we have seen God do with our own eyes. As we share, it fills us with extra joy!

Father, thank You for giving me good news to share about You and what You’re doing in my life. Remind me that it is both a keepsake and a treasure. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

To Us a Child Is Born

“You have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.” (Isaiah 9:4b)

Scripture: Isaiah 9:3–7

Song: “Holy Forever“

When my son was a toddler, his eczema was so bad that the itching woke him up at night. We applied topical steroids to the worst red patches and moisturizers to his whole body, then dressed him in tight-fitting pajamas to avoid irritating his skin. When he was three, we discovered that he was allergic to pollen and two dozen foods, and he was highly allergic to our cat. We found the cat a new home and started him on allergy medicine.

Months later, I was going through his dresser drawers, removing the clothing he’d grown out of. I pulled out a half dozen sets of tight-fitting pajamas and burst into tears, not because my son was growing up, but because so much had changed. His eczema wasn’t gone, but it had cleared up to the point that he wore normal clothing and no longer woke up at night crying from his itchy skin. For years we had battled for our little boy’s comfort, and now the battle was over. The joy I felt overwhelmed me.

Isaiah is describing an Israelite victory so complete that the enslaving yoke is shattered, and the battle clothes are burned. The passage also describes Christ’s future reign. We can imagine the relief and joy we will feel when all battles are over and Christ is on His throne.

Father, You are a Mighty God, my Everlasting Father, and my Prince of Peace. I praise You for the life of Your Son and the victories in my life. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Mary Points Others to Jesus

His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” (John 2:5)

Scripture: John 2:1–5

Song: “Build My Life “

As a teacher I can explain things clearly and hold the attention of dozens of children. As a cook, I can bake scrumptious lasagna and homemade bread. As a writer, I can proofread and plot and entertain. As a gardener, I plant beans and tomatoes expectantly. There are many situations in life where I enter a room with confidence. But not when it comes to decorating!

I appreciate beauty, but I have zero skills when it comes to making spaces beautiful. My decoration efforts end up looking like the clearance section of a craft aisle. Last year I volunteered to help set up for a wedding reception in the gymnasium at my church. I walked in, sheepishly spread my hands before the woman in charge, and asked what I could do. She put me to work arranging chairs, spreading tablecloths, and fulfilling her vision for centerpieces. I did exactly as I was told, and the gym was transformed and became lovely.

There are times in life when we feel like we know what we’re doing, and there are times when we are out of our comfort zone. Mary saw a need, and she pointed others to Jesus. She knew that it was better to put the problem into His capable hands than to try to solve it herself. No matter what situations we face, if we’re wise, we will spread our hands and say to the Lord, “I will do whatever You tell me.”

Father, thank You that You can handle any situation that comes my way. Please lead me and guide me today. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.