99 Bible Promises for Tough Times

Randy Petersen

99 Bible Promises for Tough Times

Randy Petersen

WATERBROOK
PRESS

99 Bible Promises for Tough Times
Published by WaterBrook Press
12265 Oracle Boulevard, Suite 200
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80921

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (KJV) are taken from the King James Version.

Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

ISBN 978-0-307-45838-4
ISBN 978-0-307-45844-5 (electronic)

Copyright © 2009 by WaterBrook Multnomah Publishing Group

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published in the United States by WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House Inc., New York.

WaterBrook and its deer colophon are registered trademarks of Random House Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Petersen, Randy.
99 Bible promises for tough times / Randy Petersen.—1st ed.
p. cm.
ISBN 978-0-307-45838-4 — ISBN 978-0-307-45844-5 (electronic) 1. Suffering—Biblical teaching. 2. Bible—Quotations. 3. God (Christianity)—Promises. I. Title.
BS680.S854P48 2009
242'.5—dc22
2009011975

Printed in the United States of America
2009—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Special Sales
Most WaterBrook Multnomah books are available at special quantity discounts when purchased in bulk by corporations, organizations, and special-interest groups. Custom imprinting or excerpting can also be done to fit special needs. For information, please e-mail SpecialMarkets@WaterBrookMultnomah.com or call 1-800-603-7051.

Excerpted from 99 Bible Promises for Tough Times by Randy Petersen Copyright © 2009 by WaterBrookMultnomah Publishing Group. Excerpted by permission of WaterBrook Press, a division of Random House, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or reprinted without permission in writing from the publisher.

Contents

Introduction 1

1 When You Face Financial Difficulties 3

2 In Times of Poor Health 17

3 When You Have Anxiety or Conflict 33

4 When You Struggle with Sin and Guilt 47

5 When God Seems Far Away 59

6 Challenges in Your Work and Service 71

7 When You Lose a Loved One 85

Introduction

For everything that was written in the past
was written to teach us, so that through
endurance and the encouragement
of the Scriptures we might have hope.
—Romans 15:4

Maybe you know someone who always has a positive outlook. No matter what misfortunes occur, this person is always looking on the bright side. When you go through a time of suffering, this person is always ready with a cheery word.

Maybe you secretly want to strangle that person.

This is not a book of happy denial for difficult situations. It's not about turning pessimism to optimism or finding the silver lining in every mist. Life is tough. And if you've been watching the news lately, you know it may be getting tougher. If we're going to get through these problems, we have to get *through* them. We can't tap-dance around them. Maybe Little Orphan Annie can get away with that as she convinces President Roosevelt that "the sun'll come up tomorrow," but this ain't Broadway. We're knee-deep in real life.

One great thing about the Bible is that it confronts real life. It stands up to real issues. The Old Testament character Job faces every catastrophe you can think of, but as he pleads his case with God, he still sings, "I know that my Redeemer lives" (19:25). The apostle Paul lists all the beatings, arrests, and shipwrecks he has endured, he tells about his unanswered prayer, and he still hears God saying, "My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

God's promises come out of gritty situations, so they can speak to your gritty situations. He doesn't always tell you what you want to hear, but he always seems to change the camera angle. If you're locked on today's problems, he'll show you tomorrow. If you're worried about tomorrow, he'll show you eternity.

Your tough times may be personal or relational, financial or health-related. Maybe you have suffered a loss or you fear you soon will. Whatever your difficulty is, God promises to meet you there.

1 When You Face Financial Difficulties

"The economy is hitting us hard," said one woman to her best friend. "No vacation this year. We were going to go to Disney World, but now we'll just be renting a few cartoons on DVD. Not quite the same thing."

"I know what you mean," her friend replied. "Our house is now worth less than our mortgage. I think our 401(k) is now a 201(k)."

It's nice when you can laugh about it, but spiraling economic woes are wreaking havoc in many families. Layoffs, cutbacks, reductions in pay—it's tough all over.

And we're not just talking about some numbers in a bankbook. Economic issues affect basic questions of our lives. Can you send your kids to college? Will you have to work another decade before retiring? Can you squeeze a few more years out of your current clunker before getting a new car? It's only natural to worry about these things.

Except Jesus told us not to.

Money was one of Jesus's most frequent subjects. He challenged people to focus on God rather than their pocketbook. How can we worry about money when the Creator of all good things has promised to care for us?

Stock markets go up and down. People get hired and fired. Nest eggs sometimes get stolen by swindlers. That's why Jesus told us to deposit our treasure—and our hearts—in heaven. No matter how iffy the economy, God is a sure thing. We can always count on his promises.

First Things First

But seek first his kingdom and his
righteousness, and all these things
will be given to you as well.
—Matthew 6:33

Jesus had just been chiding his listeners for worrying too much. "What shall we eat?" "What shall we wear?" And if you're fretting that you won't be able to afford the latest fashions this spring, Jesus has advice for you: look at the lilies of the field. "Not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these" (Luke 12:27). And if God provides such amazing styles for simple plants, what will he provide for you?

The key, Jesus said, is to put first things first. Don't spend your energy obsessing over your wardrobe or your menu, but focus on how God wants you to live. Let him be your king. And then he'll take care of all these other necessities of life.

Delight and Desire

Delight yourself in the Lord
and he will give you the desires of your heart.
—Psalm 37:4

On their honeymoon, the groom looked over as his bride enjoyed a spectacular sunset. "I love to see you being happy," he said.

Thinking that over for a moment, she replied, "That's going to work out pretty well then, isn't it?"

She was right. If his main desire was to bring her delight, then whenever she was happy, he would be happy too. Of course it was still just the honeymoon.

The psalmist is saying the same sort of thing about our relationship with God. At face value, you might take this promise as a kind of blank check. "Lord, I want a house, a car, a vacation." But when we find delight in the Lord, we want what he wants. We just want to make him happy.

PAYBACK

And my God will meet all your needs according
to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.
—PHILIPPIANS 4:19

The apostle Paul knew all about economic hardship. "I know what it is to be in need," he told the Philippians (verse 12), but there were also times of plenty. He had learned to be content whether rich or poor.

In these personal comments at the end of this letter to the church at Philippi, Paul thanked them for some gifts they had sent.

Like many of us, he probably wished he could get them a return gift, but he was in prison at the moment. It wasn't easy to run out to Wal-Mart for a little something.

Instead, he asked God to return the favor on his behalf. He knew the Lord had more than enough "glorious riches" to meet their needs, just as Paul's own needs were being met—thanks to their generosity.

Making Your Mark

The world and its desires pass away, but the man
who does the will of God lives forever.
—1 John 2:17

"Everything I've worked for. Gone." The man was watching the stock market slide with alarm. He was heavily invested, and his shares were tumbling in value. "That's the fortune I was going to leave my kids."

Our recent economic troubles have caused similar heartache with many parents who were trying to build a legacy, something their children could live on in the future. But what is the best legacy? What fortune really lasts? Not money or the things it can buy. The apostle John reminds us that our lasting treasure comes from doing what God wants. That's an inheritance that will enrich your children's lives forever. Maybe we can all use this time to refocus on what really matters.

24/7

> Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said,
> "Never will I leave you;
> never will I forsake you."
>
> —HEBREWS 13:5

"Fair-weather friends," we call them. They're happy to share the good times with us, but when things go sour, they're otherwise engaged. The anguish of the current crisis is just made worse by the sense of neglect, even betrayal, from these so-called friends. But God isn't like that. He's with us 24/7, always ready to respond to our prayers.

This promise from the book of Hebrews doesn't seem to connect right away. What does God's faithfulness have to do with loving money? Think about it. Can money make the same promise? No, the almighty dollar *often* forsakes us. We're far better off with a heart full of God than a handful of money.

20/20

> Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?
>
> —JAMES 2:5

James had just given a hypothetical example: Suppose a rich man walks into your church. You'd give him the best seat in the house, making a poor man sit on the floor. This is wrong, James says. It's nearsighted.

Sure, the world sees the rich man as the most important person in the room, but God sees differently. Jesus often said that, in God's kingdom, the first would be last and the last first. He called the poor "blessed," perhaps because they get to trust God for everything.

If you're worried because financial problems are threatening to make you poor, put on the specs of James 2:5 and see things from God's perspective.

This Is a Test

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."

—Malachi 3:10

The Israelites were commanded to bring the first tenth of their harvest to the temple. This tithe was offered to God as a way of saying that he was more important than anyone else. But in Malachi's time, people were neglecting this obligation. So God dared them with this extravagant promise.

When our finances get tight, it's easy to cut down on our donations to church and charities. But what if we were to take that dare, to continue making God the first priority in our shrinking budget? What blessings could we expect?

Reading the Will

Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
—Matthew 5:5

It's a familiar movie scene: the greedy family gathering for the reading of the rich man's will. They're shocked when the entire estate goes to…the humble housekeeper.

That's the picture Jesus offers. In a world that prizes toughness, ambition, reaching for what you want, and knocking everyone else out of the way, the earth will be inherited by…the meek. These are the people who don't force their will upon others. They put others first. They don't grab; they give.

You might feel humbled by your financial circumstances. Maybe you're blaming yourself for being *too* meek, for not being more cutthroat in your business dealings. But Jesus maps out a different pathway to success. In due time, God's entire estate will be willed to…you.

Disaster Plan

Cast your bread upon the waters,
for after many days you will find it again.
Give portions to seven, yes to eight,
for you do not know what disaster may come
upon the land.
—Ecclesiastes 11:1–2

Ecclesiastes is the most depressing book of the Bible, so it's no surprise to find a reference to disaster. Yet there's a promise in these verses, as well as a strategy. You might think that casting your bread on the waters will yield only moldy bread, but the author probably meant exporting grain to overseas trading partners.

A sense of impending disaster might tempt you to hoard what you have, but this promise invites you to share it, invest it, spread it around. Give freely to those around you, and in your time of need you'll see your resources coming back to you.

Satisfied

Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing
love
and his wonderful deeds for men,

for he satisfies the thirsty
and fills the hungry with good things.
—Psalm 107:8–9

Kids crave candy. You might have experienced the incessant whining that goes on at the checkout counter of a supermarket or convenience store. Smart parents know that an overdose of candy spells trouble, but children don't. They're convinced that the parent who says no is the meanest ogre on earth.

The same dynamic often occurs between us and God, except we're on the younger end of that exchange. "Lord, why won't you give me this? I want it! If you loved me, you'd give it to me!" But the Lord promises to fill us with "good things"—not whatever we want, but the things that truly satisfy.

Good Work

God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that
in all things at all times, having all that you need,
you will abound in every good work.
—2 Corinthians 9:8

Ray worked for a struggling company, so he didn't say much when he sat day after day at an obsolete computer. It had a painfully slow Internet connection and couldn't run many cutting-edge programs

because it just didn't have the memory. Finally he told his boss, "I know money's tight, but I could work so much better if I had better equipment. I don't need luxury. I just want to do good work."

That's the idea we find in 2 Corinthians. We're called to help others, give to the needy, and share the good news, and God gives us what we need to do the "good work" he wants us to do.

12 Laptop

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

—Luke 6:38

We have shopping carts nowadays. Food comes prepackaged in specified amounts. This promise gives us a snapshot of everyday life a few millenniums ago. Back then, we'd buy grain at the market, where it was measured out by the seller and poured into the folds of our garments.

Jesus says that a spirit of giving comes back to help us. If we are generous to others, then the people we deal with will be generous to us, not only giving us what we pay for, but also pressing it down to make room for more, and topping it off for "good measure."

Don't let a tight budget tighten your heart too. Show grace and you'll receive it.

13 Prisoners of Hope

Return to your fortress, O prisoners of hope;
even now I announce that I will restore twice as
much to you.
—Zechariah 9:12

The bottom dropped out for the residents of Judah as the mighty Babylonians swept through their land, taking their money, their leaders, and finally *them.* They had considered their capital, Jerusalem, an impregnable fortress, but now it lay in ruins, their temple smoldering. For seventy years they languished in Babylon, with dreams of returning home. New generations were brought up with that hope in their hearts.

"Prisoners of hope," the prophet called them, and there's a deep double meaning. Of course these captives held the hope of returning, but in a way, the hope held them. That's true today too. When you trust the Lord, no matter how bad things get, the hope still holds you. The Lord will restore.

14 A Well-Watered Garden

The Lord will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land

and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.
—Isaiah 58:11

Jim was a brash college student on a study tour in Israel when he decided to hike from Jerusalem to Jericho. The arid climate was even more so with the summer heat as Jim followed the dry waterways through the canyons of the Judean desert. He had several canteens with him, but he was still rationing his water carefully.

At one point he rounded a bend and came upon a lush green garden, a well-irrigated oasis. Water fell into the streambed there—melted snow from the mountains—and children were splashing in a pool.

This is the Lord's promise. Your dry life will grow green again.

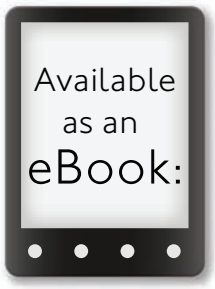
WATERBROOK MULTNOMAH
PUBLISHING GROUP
A DIVISION OF RANDOM HOUSE, INC.

Want to keep reading?
You've got options:

Purchase a copy direct from the publisher or from your favorite retailer:

BUY NOW

Download a copy for your eReader and keep reading right away:



amazonkindle
Google books
iBooks
nook by Barnes & Noble

And More...