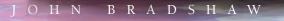
P R O M I S E S OF PEACE



FOUR GALLANT MEN

They gave their lives so others could live

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

D uring World War II, a U.S. Army transport ship, the *Dorchester*, was transporting hundreds of U.S. troops to Europe. It was a dangerous business, and while the ship was traveling to Greenland it was torpedoed by a German warship. Troops moved with urgency to make it off the stricken ship alive, each man rushing to put on his life jacket. But in the chaos it was realized that there weren't enough life jackets to go around. Surviving in those frigid waters would have been difficult at best, but not having a life jacket would have made survival impossible.

The four chaplains on the ship—a Catholic, two Protestants, and a Jew—encouraged the troops, helped them off the ship, and then gave their life jackets to four of the men. Singing and praying together, they went down with the ship and died. They chose to make the ultimate sacrifice, giving their lives so that others—others they did not even know—could live. Romans 5:8 speaks of Jesus' sacrifice when it says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

In an uncertain world characterized by injustice and inequity, disparity and despair, in a world where most people face struggles of some kind interpersonal, financial, medical, or emotional there is a peace that comes from knowing the God of the universe was willing—is willing—to make the ultimate sacrifice for you. God so loved the world that He gave Jesus to die on the cross. As long as you're part of God's vast creation, you can know that Jesus died for you. The cross occurred with you on God's mind, and as the second coming approaches, Jesus is planning to come back to this world for you.

Every person on planet Earth is supremely special to God. The sacrifice of four gallant men gives us a glimpse of the selfless sacrifice made by Jesus. The Bible says Jesus died for you, to give you everlasting life. Let your experience be buoyed up by knowing no less a Person than the God of the universe has demonstrated His commitment to you.



THE BEST POLICY

A homeless man finds \$40,000, and ...

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. Matthew 19:29

A homeless man in Boston found a backpack containing more than \$40,000 in cash and traveler's checks. Even though he had a fortune in his hands—a fortune he desperately needed—he contacted the police and turned in the bag, and the man who lost the bag got it back, along with all the money it contained. Boston police honored the finder, Glen James, for what he had done. But the story wasn't over for honest Mr. James; an online fund was started for him, and in just two days it had raised over \$90,000!

A man with nothing found riches, and gave them away, only to receive more than he could have ever imagined. That's how the good news of salvation works: when you give whatever you have to God —your heart and your mind, your entire life—you end up with far more than you had before. Peter, never afraid to give voice to what was on his mind, once asked Jesus, "We have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" Jesus responded with a promise to humanity that will flood your heart with peace:

"Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life" (Matthew 19:29).

You don't ever need to feel as though making a decision for Jesus will be to your detriment. Jesus was clear: honor me, and I'll honor you. As James wrote, if you humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, then He will lift you up (James 4:10). And we don't have to pretend that finding more than \$40,000 wouldn't be a temptation. Some would consider the easy thing would be to keep the cash and take care of personal or family needs, yet the honest decision brought real rewards. A decision for Jesus does the same—and whether or not you're better off in this world isn't the point. The greatest gift of all is eternal life—and that's coming soon!



NATURALIZED!

Where is your citizenship?

And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, "You are not My people," There they shall be called sons of the living God. Romans 9:26

M y Congolese friend proudly showed me the video recording of the ceremony where he became a naturalized American citizen. He was so happy, so proud. Born on another continent and raised in difficult circumstances, and now—an American!

In Romans 9:26, Paul quoted the prophet Hosea and said, "And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there they shall be called sons of the living God." There are several stories in the Bible of people who have experienced a dramatic, almost miraculous change in their personal situation. In one day, Joseph went from languishing in prison to being second only to Pharaoh in Egypt. Daniel was moments away from being executed when he asked for time to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and after telling the king the details of the dream he was promoted to a position of high honor in Babylon. David was herding sheep when he was anointed to be the next king of Israel. And God said that a people who were not His people would become sons and daughters of the living Sovereign of the universe.

The Bible says all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. And with the wages of sin being death, the future for a rebellious world would have been hopelessly bleak but for the grace of God. God says to the undeserving, the lost, the hopeless, "They shall be called sons [and daughters] of the living God."

Once the citizen of an enemy kingdom, through the goodness of God you can now be a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. Regardless of your past, one of God's magnificent promises of peace offers you citizenship today! As a passport indicates citizenship, knowing Jesus personally is like possessing a passport to heaven. If you possess Jesus by faith, you can know your citizenship is in heaven, and you are a child of God.



VALUABLE! How much is too much?

Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. 1 Peter 1:18,19

A rare Ferrari recently sold at auction for \$27.5 million. This was not an aircraft, or an ocean liner or a hotel, but a car. Can any car be worth that much?

You might be tempted to give the obvious answer. You could say, "No, no car is worth almost \$30 million." And in terms of what a car is made from, how many hours it took to build, there is no way you could be wrong. A car would have to be made from solid gold to be worth that much money.

But if someone is willing to pay \$27.5 million for a car, then that's what the car is worth—to that person, at least. The Monet that sold at auction in New York City for tens of millions of dollars might not be worth anything to one person, but to the person who paid the huge sum of money, that's exactly what it is worth. So what, then, are you worth? What is the worth of a person, a sinful, faulty, errant human being?

Long ago, God allowed His Son to come to Earth to redeem the human family. And He paid far more than \$27.5 million. The Bible says in 1 Peter 1:18, 19, "You were not redeemed with corruptible things ... but with the precious blood of Christ."

There are promises explicit and implicit in those two verses. Clearly, the Bible says you have been redeemed. Purchased. Bought back. You have become the possession of the Majesty of the heavens. And God tells you just how much you are worth. You are worth as much to God as the life of His Son, Jesus. That's a lot to understand. How can anything be as much to someone as that person's own child?

I spoke with Dr. James Appel, who with his family is serving in a hospital in Chad, one of the least privileged countries in the entire world. James and his wife lost a child in Chad to malaria, and when I asked him about it his reply made me stop and think. He said, "Why shouldn't we lose a child to malaria here? Everyone loses a child to malaria." And then he said, "My being here has saved the lives of many Chadian people. If I had to lose a child in order to save so many people, it's a price I'm willing to pay." God was willing to pay as much as that for you, for your neighbor, and for the drunk in the gutter. If you're ever tempted to think of yourself as being worth less than you are, remember the value God places on you.

> You have become the possession of the Majesty of the heavens. And God tells you just how much you are worth. You are worth as much to God as the life of His Son, Jesus.

FAMILY You and Jesus are close!

For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother. Matthew 12:50

I twas a bit nerve-wracking at first. Getting married meant becoming part of my wife's family. Her relatives became my relatives. That's new aunts and uncles and cousins and grandparents. I became part of a new family, people from a different culture who spoke differently and had a very different history than mine. I was marrying my wife, but becoming part of a new family would impact my life in ways I could hardly imagine.

When a person accepts Jesus Christ into his or her life, the same thing happens. Upon being told His mother and brothers were waiting to speak with Him, Jesus said in Matthew 12:50, "Whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother." The ramifications of that statement are interesting.

In just as real a way as you are a part of the family in which you were raised, Jesus Himself said that when you come to Him in faith, you are His brother or sister. That's an incredibly close bond. And when you're that close to someone, it's normal for that relationship to form you in some way. Because you share the same parents, you'll often have very similar characteristics to your siblings, and many people consciously or subconsciously act in much the same way as those with whom they are raised.

In calling us His brothers and sisters, Jesus is not only speaking of the enormous privilege it is to be so close with the Savior of the universe, He's also suggesting to us that living in such close relationship to Him is going to affect us in hugely significant ways. Your behavior, attitudes, and worldview will all be altered owing to closeness to Christ. And this is something that just happens.

I never tried to tolerate grits, or say "y'all," or eat collard greens and black-eyed peas, but over time, and owing to being immersed in a new culture, some things changed without my intending them to do so.¹

So it is when you come to Jesus. You're a child of God, and you become like Jesus for the simple fact that you've become family.

¹ But I've never learned to like boiled peanuts. Some things just ain't right....



IT IS GOD'S WILL!

You can definitely know God's will ...

And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day. John 6:40

I've often been asked how someone can know God's will when faced with a decision. That's a tough question that can only be answered definitively by God Himself. What college should I attend? Is this boy/girl right for me? Do I take advantage of this business opportunity or is it better to let this one go? Some things are hard to discern.

But there are some things about God's will that are easy to know. John 6:40 says, "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." God's will is for you to have everlasting life. Let that thought sink in for a moment. The desire of the One who hung the planets in space and who scattered the stars in the sky is for you—you!—to live with Him eternally. That's what God wants. There aren't enough superlatives in the English language to adequately describe how incredible that is!

If you believe in Jesus, it's God's will that you live forever. If you trust in God, His purpose is that you will experience the blessing of salvation. Sadly, just as children who want a shiny new bicycle or the latest new toy for Christmas don't always get what their heart desires, God doesn't always get what He wants. Even though He has made salvation so accessible and so freely available, only a precious few people are going to surrender their life to God and receive the gift God wants to give them.

It isn't that God has to be convinced to give us eternal life. He has shown us and told us countless times that He wants to see us in heaven. But each individual must make the decision to accept God's gift.

Have you ever given something to someone simply because you knew that person really wanted it? And you thought, *If you want it that much, I'll just give it to you*? It might be that we should say to God, "If You want my life so much that You were prepared to let Jesus die for me, then I'll just give it to You."

Which college, which spouse, which job, which new car—who knows? But when it comes to salvation, that's been settled. It's definitely God's will for you to have that!

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KEEPING GOOD HEALTH

It's important to get regular check-ups ...

If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you. Exodus 15:26

I found this alarming. I read that one in seven Americans have high cholesterol, and yet many people have no idea what their cholesterol levels are. Now, some people earn their high cholesterol the good, old-fashioned way—a high-fat diet and little to no exercise. But then there are others who do everything right, but for some reason or another their cholesterol level is all wrong.

If you're concerned about your cholesterol—or about some other aspect of your health— it's important that you visit a doctor. It's right to know how your blood pressure is, how your cholesterol is doing, what your triglycerides might be, or whether you're at risk for a major illness.

But as important as your physical well-being

is, it's also important to monitor how you're doing spiritually. How are things with you and God? How's your spiritual health? How's your Holy Spirit level? Too many people aren't really sure, and fail to get regular checkups.

Just as you'd visit your doctor occasionally, be sure to check in with God each day. Spend time with the Great Physician, and let the Holy Spirit make you right. God has prescribed medication that everyone needs to take: His Word as food for the soul, prayer to keep us in contact with the mind of the Almighty, sharing our faith to keep us spiritually fit.

In Exodus 15:26, God said, "I am the Lord who heals you." And while it's truly wonderful to know that the God who made us pledges to bless us spiritually, it's vital that we allow God to heal us spiritually and emotionally. If you're ailing spiritually, remember that God specializes in restoration projects. God the Cardiologist offers us a heart transplant (Ezekiel 36:26). God the Psychologist offers us a new mind (Romans 12:1). God the Counselor offers to intervene in our interpersonal conflicts (Proverbs 16:7; Matthew 6:14,15).

The God of heaven offers us not only physical but spiritual healing as well, without requiring so much as a co-pay. Accept God's promise today, and experience the healing only He can give.



FOREVER!

It might be just long enough ...

I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world. John 6:51

I remember as a child calculating how old I would be when the year 2000 arrived. As I looked into the future I thought that landmark year would never arrive, but now it's well and truly in the rear-view mirror.

When you're a kid time seems to drag on interminably. A summer seems to last forever. Even an afternoon can feel like an age. I remember before I started school going with my mother while she had her hair done. I couldn't believe a hair appointment could possibly take so long. But then, you get older, and time takes on a whole new meaning, and even years seem to pass in the blink of an eye.

I've been blessed to know many people who have lived beyond 100 years of age. Some years ago I started asking them if it seemed as if it took a long time to live for ten decades. And without exception, each centenarian has told me that 100 years happened incredibly quickly. (Friends of mine recently attended the birthday party of a lady who had turned 100, and asked her what the best thing was about being 100 years old. She told them, "No peer pressure!")

No matter what you're doing, the second hand on the clock of time continues to tick, and each day that passes is a day less that we'll spend on Earth. But even though it sometimes seems as though the hands on the clock turn around as rapidly as the blades on a fan, Jesus has made a promise of peace regarding the passage of time.

He said in John 6:51, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever." Forever. Think of that. Life "without end"—not a dream, not a fantasy, but a blessed reality. No more goodbyes. No more farewells. No more wishing you'd had known a certain person a little better, or regretting that your days for running or swimming or bike riding or hiking are now over. A life without end is promised. And it starts now, through faith in Jesus.

CHANGING TIMES

They'll be gone in five years!

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever. Isaiah 40:8

O ne of the most popular songs of the 1960s claimed that "the times, they are a-changing." If it was true then, it's more than true now, especially with the relentless march of technology.

Time.com recently reported that within five years, the following things will be gone for good in the United States of America: DVD and Blu-ray players, in-car GPS units, dial-up Internet access (which is still used by 3% of Americans), low-end digital cameras, and—interestingly—car keys. Now, that's a prediction and not a promise, but it could well be right and indicates that time is marching on.

My children asked me recently how we used to find a restaurant when we visited a new town before they were born. I explained that we'd ask someone for a recommendation, or if we were staying at a hotel we'd ask at the front desk, or that most likely we'd simply look in the Yellow Pages and make a decision that way. An even though I grew up in (what I thought was) a modern era, their response made me feel like my parents must have felt when I asked them similar questions. Today, an Internet search and a look at online reviews is a regular part of many dining experiences. The Yellow Pages? Asking at the front desk of a hotel? My children just smiled and shook their heads.

But even though the world is changing and will continue to do so, one thing that will never cease to be relevant is the Word of God. Isaiah 40:8 says, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever." It won't ever go out of style, it will never be obsolete, and try as they may, people will never find a viable replacement for it. The counsel given by the Holy Spirit through ancient prophets or through Jesus Himself still speaks to today's world, and it still meets the needs of any language or culture.

In a changing world, you can hold tight to the Word of God.

LAYING ASIDE THE WEIGHT

Some things you're simply better off without ...

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. Hebrews 12:1

A lot of years ago I arrived in London, England, for the very first time. Having bought a ticket on the Underground—the subway—to travel on the District Line to Wimbledon, I tried to get through the little gate that opens onto the platform. But I was carrying so much baggage that I couldn't fit through the gate!

I saw something of what Hebrews 12:1 is getting at when it says, "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us." Just like I had to take the pack off my back and put my other bags aside so I could get through that narrow gate, we're encouraged to lay aside every weight every burden or encumbrance—if we want to get through what Jesus called the "Narrow Gate" and into the eternal kingdom. It's often easy to see what others should do. "That girl will never amount to anything until she gets rid of that useless guy she's with." Or, "If that man would stop wasting time on his Xbox and took evening classes instead, he could make a real success of his life." Easy to see in others, but what about in you? What is God urging you to put aside so you can excel spiritually?

Some of us make it hard for ourselves because of our bad habits, or attitudes, or the crowd we associate with. And it isn't only bad things—sometimes it could be a hobby that consumes your time. We can often find time for Facebook while we can't find time for reading the Bible. Some people spend so much time at work that there's no time left to be active in church, and the spiritual tone of an entire family suffers as a result.

This is something we can talk to God about. You want to thrive spiritually—you want to give yourself every advantage. Within Hebrews 12:1 is a powerful promise: When we lay aside the weight, the besetting sin, we can "run with patience the race that is set before us." Sometimes we harm our relationship with God because we don't lay aside certain things that are only burdens. And God's promise is that when we let them go, we'll not only run, but through Jesus run to victory!





EXTINCT! Faith like a dodo bird?

Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

Revelation 3:11

In 1813, John James Audubon saw a flock of passenger pigeons so large that it took three days to pass. I remember doubting that could be possible, but I learned that millions of passenger pigeons used to inhabit the United States and they traveled in gigantic flocks. But as incredible as it seems, the last passenger pigeon died in 1914 in the Cincinnati Zoo, where it had lived alone in a cage for four years. The passenger pigeon is extinct.

It hardly seems that such a thing could be possible. The short story of the passenger pigeon's extinction is that they tasted good and were easy to catch—and so today they're as gone as the dodo and the South Island laughing owl. They simply no longer exist. We're familiar now with tales of extinction or near extinction. It seems tragic that poaching and illegal trading have brought many species to the brink of extinction, and there's a chance that some of the most majestic animals won't survive to be seen by tomorrow's children.

What's even more tragic is that the faith of some people ends up like the passenger pigeon. In Revelation 3:11 Jesus says, "Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown." Faith in God must be protected, because when it isn't, it often disappears into oblivion. Few people recognize that faith has real enemies and needs to be proactively preserved, and protected against doubt, unbelief, and secularism like animals need to be protected from illegal hunting and the destruction of habitat.

And protection programs work! The American bald eagle was taken off the endangered species list in 2007 because its numbers have increased from fewer than 500 nesting pairs to 5,000 in just 40 years. In 1980, there were five black robins known to exist on New Zealand's Chatham Islands. *Five!* But a desperate intervention program saw those numbers rise to 250 by 2017, and it is believed the black robin has made it back from the precipice.

You don't want to become spiritually careless or casual. Be sure that every day you invite Christ into your heart. Don't let your faith become extinct. He promises today that He is "coming quickly." Living faith will prepare you to meet Him on that great day!



SELF-IMAGE

What did the famous actress say?

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. 1 John 3:2

I twas really interesting to hear what the famous actress said. She was commenting on some glamorous photos of herself when she said, "That doesn't look like me at all! I love Photoshop more than anything in the world." And then she added, "People don't look like that."

The photos were actually a lie. They had been electronically enhanced, presenting an image of the young lady that only exists on a computer, and not in reality. And sadly, what happens is that some people—usually young and impressionable—see those pictures and aspire to be like that actress or that model. Yet such a standard can never be attained, because not even the person in the photo looks like the person in the photo!

Many people are trying to live up to someone else's ideal of beauty, femininity, or masculinity.

People even develop eating disorders or feel lousy about themselves because of what society tells them they should look like, or act like, or what they should own. But when we really understand who we truly are, we'll put ourselves under a lot less of that kind of pressure.

1 John 3:2 says, "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." Don't miss what the Bible says. Believers in Jesus are the "children of God." Who can possibly have self-image issues when they know in their heart that they are a true child of God, a member of heaven's royal family?!

It isn't wrong to do your very best, to look good, or to be a high achiever, but it's extremely unhealthy when your entire self-worth is bound up in how you look, or whether or not you look like the in-crowd. And it's not only unhealthy, it's unnecessary.

No matter how you look, no matter what others think of you, rejoice today and feel really good about yourself. Because God's promise of peace to you is that you are a child of God.

THE GOD OF THE IMPOSSIBLE

When you cannot, God can!

Then the Lord said to Gideon, "By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand. Let all the other people go, every man to his place." Judges 7:7

G od is the God of the impossible. Gideon was chosen by God to be the deliverer of Israel and was charged with leading the armies of Israel against the Midianites. In order to even have a chance of defeating the Midianites Gideon would have needed had to have a huge army. Judges 6:7 says that the Midianites "came up as grasshoppers for multitude, for both they and their camels were without number."

Yet in Judges 7:7 God says to Gideon, "By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand. Let all the other people go, every man to his place." Three hundred men against a massive, well-armed fighting force? Utterly impossible. Except that God had said, "By the three hundred men ... I will save you." This was a promise of peace. "I will save you." God gave Gideon His word that He would accomplish the seemingly impossible task.

The same God who brought down the walls of Jericho and opened up the Red Sea would do the impossible again, which is your assurance that God can do the impossible for you! Often, believers in God find themselves in impossible situations, humanly speaking. People married to unbelievers have come to the place where it seems simply impossible to get through to their spouse about the love and goodness of God. But what is impossible for a human being is not impossible for God. While an important test or exam can seem like a hopeless task, God can provide wisdom and blessing in moments like those.

In the beginning, God called the world out of nothing. Nobody else could do what God did during the Creation week. He is the God of the impossible. A challenge at work, financial difficulties—God is able. Always able. Of course, He doesn't always act in the way we think He should, but that's because He knows what is truly best.

Hang on to God in those impossible situations. It is often not until something looks impossible that God steps in to show that success depends on Him. Gideon could have defeated Midian with a far bigger army than he had, but God may not

then have received the glory He should receive, and Gideon and others would have been tempted to trust in themselves.

Against the odds, Gideon led Israel to an amazing victory through God's power, and God can do the same for you. Hold on to God today. He's the God of the impossible. He said to Gideon, and He says to you, "I will save you."

The same God who brought down the walls of Jericho and opened up the Red Sea would do the impossible again, which is your assurance that God can do the impossible for you!



MIGHTY! Here's how God sees you

And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him, and said to him, "The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor!" Judges 6:12

I fyou've ever wanted to know what God thinks of you, you can find out by reading a simple phrase in the Bible. Too many people brand themselves as failures, or as incapable or inadequate. But that's not how God sees you.

In the book of Judges, Israel was in a dire situation. They were in such bondage to the heathen Midianites that Gideon was threshing wheat in hiding so the Midianites wouldn't find out what he was doing and take his wheat. It was then that "the Angel of the Lord appeared to him, and said to him, 'The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor" (Judges 6:12).

It is thought Gideon was probably a teenager. He was from a poor family and described himself as the 'least' in his family. And yet God described Gideon as a "mighty man of valor!" In fact, in human terms Gideon was anything but mighty. He was as afraid of the Midianites as anyone, as his behavior revealed. But God possessed the ability to see Gideon not merely as he was, but as he could be through God's power.

While Gideon could only see an acorn, God saw Gideon as a mighty oak. Inside every human being there exists immense possibilities. A dear friend of mine was born into poverty, the youngest of many children in a tiny village on India's east coast. He was destined for the same life as every other boy in his village, herding buffalo or tending a garden, eking out a meager existence earning only a few dollars a day. But when a pastor begged the father of this young boy to allow the church to sponsor the boy's education, everything changed. Today, this man is an extraordinarily talented ophthalmologist, blessing thousands of lives in remarkable ways.

God sees the possibilities in you, whether they be professional, physical, or spiritual. God has a place in His work for every one of His children, and when we make ourselves open to His working He can achieve in us what we could never achieve without His help.

Like Gideon, you are a mighty man or mighty woman of valor. Because when God has you, there's no limit to what He can do in you—today.

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