

# Four Motivations to Praise God

Psalm 33

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**Main point:** God's perfections should move us to overwhelming and spontaneous praise.

Sing for joy in the LORD, O you righteous ones;  
Praise is becoming to the upright.  
<sup>2</sup> Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre;  
Sing praises to Him with a harp of ten strings.  
<sup>3</sup> Sing to Him a new song;  
Play skillfully with a shout of joy.  
<sup>4</sup> For the word of the LORD is upright,  
And all His work is *done* in faithfulness.  
<sup>5</sup> He loves righteousness and justice;  
The earth is full of the lovingkindness of the LORD.  
<sup>6</sup> By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,  
And by the breath of His mouth all their host.  
<sup>7</sup> He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap;  
He lays up the deeps in storehouses.  
<sup>8</sup> Let all the earth fear the LORD;  
Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.  
<sup>9</sup> For He spoke, and it was done;  
He commanded, and it stood fast.  
<sup>10</sup> The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations;  
He frustrates the plans of the peoples.  
<sup>11</sup> The counsel of the LORD stands forever,  
The plans of His heart from generation to generation.  
<sup>12</sup> Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,  
The people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance.  
<sup>13</sup> The LORD looks from heaven;  
He sees all the sons of men;  
<sup>14</sup> From His dwelling place He looks out  
On all the inhabitants of the earth,  
<sup>15</sup> He who fashions the hearts of them all,  
He who understands all their works.  
<sup>16</sup> The king is not saved by a mighty army;  
A warrior is not delivered by great strength.  
<sup>17</sup> A horse is a false hope for victory;  
Nor does it deliver anyone by its great strength.  
<sup>18</sup> Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him,  
On those who hope for His lovingkindness,  
<sup>19</sup> To deliver their soul from death  
And to keep them alive in famine.  
<sup>20</sup> Our soul waits for the LORD;  
He is our help and our shield.  
<sup>21</sup> For our heart rejoices in Him,  
Because we trust in His holy name.  
<sup>22</sup> Let Your lovingkindness, O LORD, be upon us,  
According as we have hoped in You.

## **PSALM 33**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

On September 11, 2001, when the terrorists attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Psalm 33 was the psalm that many churches throughout the land read in the morning worship services.

**Psalm 33 is one of the great hymns of praise**, because it focuses our attention on Yahweh and encourages us to exalt and glorify Him. It is **designed** to encourage believers in corporate gatherings to take comfort in the sovereignty and love of God as their help in times of trouble. From beginning to end, the **subject** of this psalm is God. The psalmist writes of *God's character*, His *rule* over creation and the nations, and His *unfailing love* for His people.

**The outline of this psalm** is straightforward. It is as if the psalmist is designing the architecture of a great building. He first lays the foundation in God's character. Then he constructs the first floors in God's sovereignty over the nations, which is necessary if He is to turn events in this life to bless His people. Finally, he finishes the upper stories of the building with God's special care for His own people. The first three verses are a *call to worship* (vv.1-3). The last three verses (vv.20-22) are a conclusion in which the worshipers declare their intention of waiting trustingly on God. In between is the body of the psalm (vv.4-19), in which the psalmist gives us four reasons to praise the greatness of God.

1. The Lord's WORD (vv.4-9)
2. The Lord's PLAN (vv.10-12)
3. The Lord's EYE (vv.13-15)
4. The Lord's MIGHT (vv.16-19)

The **connection** between Psalm 32 and Psalm 33 is obvious.

- Psalm 32 describes *the joy of the person* who has confessed his or her sins and has been restored.
- Psalm 33 shows how natural it is to now thank and praise God for His lovingkindness and grace.
- Psalm 32 closes with the call to the righteous to sing praises to God.
- Psalm 33 picks up on that note and continues the chorus, "*sing for joy in the Lord, O you righteous ones; praise is becoming to the upright.*"

Psalm 33 is the first psalm in the ancient hymnbook in which we are called upon to praise the Lord with *musical instruments*. Psalm 33 is not only *an invitation to publicly praise God*, it also reminds us that no matter our circumstances, God is sovereign and, because He knows and controls all things, we can trust Him.

Alexander Maclaren once said, "There is always room for a fresh voice to praise the old Gospel, the old creation, and the old providence [of God]."

## **EXPOSITION:**

**In the opening call to praise**, we are exhorted to praise the Lord in five distinct commandments. 1) *Sing for joy* (v.1), 2) *Give thanks to the Lord* (v.2), 3), *Sing praise to Him* (v.2b), 4) *Sing to Him a new song* (v.3a), and 5) *Play skillfully* (v.3b).

Sing for joy in the LORD, O you righteous ones;  
Praise is becoming to the upright.

<sup>2</sup> Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre;

Sing praises to Him with a harp of ten strings.

<sup>3</sup> Sing to Him a new song;

Play skillfully with a shout of joy.

**The point of this exhortation** is to invoke us to praise God with *passion, fervency, sincerity, and skill*. The tiny prepositional phrase, "**in the Lord**" in verse 1, is equivalent to the New Testament phrase "*in Him*." We are to

sing *because of the Lord* and what He has done. We are to sing *to the Lord*, and *before the Lord*, therefore, we are to do our best. And, we are to sing *in the Lord*, that is, in union and communion with Him.

Verse 3 encourages us to sing a "**new song**" to God. But what is meant by *new*? In Revelation 5:9, the redeemed sing a "new song" because *they have a fresh awareness of God's grace*. And this is what it means here and throughout the psalter (Cf. Ps.40:3, 96:1; 98:1; 144:9). Every song of praise should emerge from a fresh, sweet, brisk awareness of the grace of Almighty God.

Notice, in the call to worship, the nature of this praise. Calvin translates verse 1, "*Sing loudly with joyfulness.*" Venema translates the first line of verse 2 as, "*Play elegantly well with a loud noise.*" Jonathan Edwards says of the second line of verse 3, "*play skillfully and sing with exalted voices.*" J.A. Alexander of Princeton says, "*Render a strong and striking testimony to the praise and honor of God.*" All those paraphrases and translations get the gist of it. Our praise is not to be *boring, spiritually dull, and lifeless*. It is to be with *fervor, passion, emotion, sincerity*, and in this text, the psalmist says, "*it is to be done skillfully.*"

**All of this means** that we are to use *the best lyrics we can find*, sung with *the best music we can find*, and done with *the best effort that we are capable of*. We are not free to sing anything to God in a worship service in any way. The psalmist calls upon God's people to do everything eloquently and with skill. The best lyrics, the best music, to the best of our ability.

Now, there is a **danger of music** that we need to acknowledge.

Musical instruments have played a very important role in the worship of God since the days of Job and Moses. But *how* does music play a part in the worship and praise of God? It makes us *more ardent*. It *animates us*. When we hear music that we like and music we know, it *stirs our emotions* and makes us want to sing with more *fervency*. But we must be careful with music in the worship of God, because it *is one of the great obstacles to worship in churches today*. One man said there were two churches he didn't want to go to. The first church he didn't like, because the music was so boring since they used no musical instruments. The second church he didn't like, because the music was Rock-and-Roll. Music is one of the great obstacles in the worship of God today.

Richard Baxter, who was Oliver Cromwell's favorite preacher, once said,

"As it is lawful to use the comfortable helps of spectacles and glasses in reading the Bible, so is it of music to exhilarate the soul toward God. And I think it unlawful to use such strains of music as are light, or as the congregation cannot be easily brought to understand."

In other words, music can set your soul on fire, but it can't be light—that is, *boring, monotonous, or infantile*, where you sing the same thing over 11 times. But on the other hand, it can't be so complicated that only trained musicians in the church can sing it. Songs should not be sung in another language that the people don't know. Anything that makes it difficult to sing undermines the purpose of worship to the honor of God. Baxter goes on to say,

"...much more on purpose to commit the whole work of singing to the choristers and exclude the congregation, I am not willing to join in such a church where I am shut out of this noble work of praise."

Baxter is speaking with his typical straightforward manner, and I think we can agree. Music is important in the worship of God, but at the end of the day, it is to be a participatory act so that we all share in it. And, it does not matter how beautiful the music is or how well we harmonize when we sing, unless our hearts are

surrendered to God in devotion, beautiful singing with an unsundered heart is repugnant and unacceptable in the eyes of God! One other observation must be considered in the opening call to worship.

### **Who is called upon to sing to the Lord with passion, fervency, sincerity, and skill?**

- **Verse 1**—Sing for joy in the LORD, O you righteous ones; Praise is becoming to the upright.

Verse 1 teaches us that the only people who are called upon to worship God are “**righteous people**,” that is, *people who are dressed in the righteousness of Christ (2 Cor.5:21)*, people whose *account has been credited* by faith (*Rom.5:1*), and people who are *on the road of righteousness* because the Holy Spirit has come into their hearts to bring their lives into conformity with the Word of God. They, and they alone, are called upon to **sing for joy in the Lord**, because they, and they alone, are capable of praising the Lord from the heart.

An unbeliever may be a beautiful singer, but if they don't *believe what they sing*, their praise is not “**becoming**.” Calvin said, “Unbelievers who have never tasted His goodness cannot praise Him from the heart, and God has no pleasure in His name being pronounced by their unholy tongues.”

When it says that “**praise is becoming to the upright**” (*Ps.92:1; 147:1*), the psalmist is saying that *there is no work that you can be involved in better than the work of praising God*. And this work is not something that we just do at home, in the shower, or in the car, but before all men publicly!

Now, in the second major section of the psalm, the psalmist lays out a litany of the perfections of God as motivating reasons behind the call to praise.

### **1. The Lord's WORD (vv.4-9)**

- <sup>4</sup>For the word of the LORD is upright,  
And all His work is *done* in faithfulness.  
<sup>5</sup>He loves righteousness and justice;  
The earth is full of the lovingkindness of the LORD.  
<sup>6</sup>By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,  
And by the breath of His mouth all their host.  
<sup>7</sup>He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap;  
He lays up the deeps in storehouses.  
<sup>8</sup>Let all the earth fear the LORD;  
Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.  
<sup>9</sup>For He spoke, and it was done;  
He commanded, and it stood fast.

This section is a series of six affirming (synonymous) parallelisms; that is, there is an “A” line, then the “B” line *affirms* what the “A” line says. Notice, “**The word of the Lord**” leads off the stanza, and “**all His work**” follows. Together, David seeks to show us that God's word and His works, His attributes and His actions, always go together.

God's word is **upright** (*yasar*), that is, *straight, level, right*, and His work is characterized by “**faithfulness**” (*enunah*)—*steadiness, reliability, and honesty*. If God's Word is false at one point, how can we believe what He says about anything else? But God's Word is always right and never fails! God's *laws* are perfect, God's *promises* are true, God's *threats* are real, God's *commandments* are pure and sure because of what Numbers 23:19 says,

- “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 it?  
Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?”

James Montgomery Boice points out, “How different it is with us. We say one thing and do another, so that we are inconsistent at best and hypocritical or blatantly dishonest at worse. God is utterly consistent, always upright, and consistently good. Thus, He is always to be praised for everything He says and for everything He does. There are no areas of His speech or actions for which He can be faulted.”

This is reason number one for praising God—His right and faithful character.

Now, beginning at verse 6 and down through verse 9, the psalmist “stitches” together *God’s creative acts* and *His redemptive acts* to show that God’s sovereignty is over His works of creation and the preservation of His people. Verse 6 clearly points us back to the creation narrative of Genesis 1, and verse 7 takes us to the Song of Moses, which they sang at Israel’s deliverance (*Ex.15:1-18*).

- <sup>6</sup>By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,  
And by the breath of His mouth all their host.

The image the psalmist wants us to see is that the heavens—that is, all the stars and planets—came into existence without any difficulty by the breath of God! Think about it, God simply “breathes,” and the skies were made, and the stars popped out! We are told by scientists that there are twenty galaxies within 2.5 million light-years of the earth, several thousand within 50 million light-years, and more than 100 million can be photographed with modern telescopes! When we think of how vast the heavens are, which Yahweh has made, we should sing to the Lord!

- <sup>7</sup>He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap;  
He lays up the deeps in storehouses.

Verse 7 adds the Exodus event to the mix to remind us of God’s power. When God divided the Red Sea, it was as if He scooped the sea and the ocean and put it into a jar. The next line says the same thing, but with a different picture. The image is of God placing the 140 million square miles of ocean that constitute 70% of the earth’s surface into “storehouse” or barn.

Does it not stagger you to think of that kind of power?

Who can light the fires  
Of a thousand burning suns  
Blazing in the heavens?  
There is only One—  
He is our God.<sup>1</sup>

Theologians use the Latin phrase “ex nihilo,” which means He made everything out of nothing. The psalmist employs this rich, vivid language to convey to us that God’s word is entirely different from and infinitely superior to anything mere human beings can do!

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<sup>1</sup> Sovereign Grace Music, *He Is Our God*

Now, if God's word is exercised with such power, without any opposition or failure, then what should be our response to this truth? Verse 8 tells us...

- <sup>8</sup> Let all the earth fear the LORD;  
Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.

Fear the Lord! Do you fear the Lord? Do you stand in jaw-dropping, silent awestruck wonder of Him! The word of the Lord and the consistency of His actions is reason to praise Him today,

- <sup>9</sup> For He spoke, and it was done;  
He commanded, and it stood fast.

## 2. The Lord's PLAN (vv.10-12)

The second great example of the unbreakable link between *God's word* and *His work* is *providence*, which is the ordering of all things according to the secret counsels of His will.

- <sup>10</sup> The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations;  
He frustrates the plans of the peoples.  
<sup>11</sup> The counsel of the LORD stands forever,  
The plans of His heart from generation to generation.  
<sup>12</sup> Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,  
The people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance.

One thing that is obvious about life as one looks at it through the lens of the Bible is both God and man makes plans—*I* make plans, *you* make plans, *God* makes plans. My plans don't always succeed, your plans don't always succeed, God's plans always succeed, and they always take precedence over our plans.

Just as God has power over nature, so He also controls the nations.

- **Proverbs 19:21**—Many plans are in a man's heart,  
But the counsel of the LORD will stand.
- **Proverbs 16:1**—The plans of the heart belong to man,  
But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.
- **Proverbs 16:9**—The mind of man plans his way,  
But the LORD directs his steps.
- **Job 23:13-14**—But He is unique and who can turn Him?  
And *what* His soul desires, that He does.  
<sup>14</sup> For He performs what is appointed for me,  
And many such *decrees* are with Him.

Every good teacher brings out both the negative and the positive in his teaching, and the psalmist is a good teacher. He declares God's sovereignty over the nations both negatively and positively to emphasize God's power! God "nullifies" (makes ineffective) and "frustrates" the counsel of nations and

the plans of peoples, but His "counsel" and the "plans" of His heart stands from generation to generation.

Oh my! His character is righteous, His works are powerful, and His purposes are enduring and unshakable! When evil people and nations conspire to resist His will, God laughs, according to Psalm 2, in contempt of their dumb efforts!

Look back in history and listen to the testimony of an arrogant king who had been humbled by God.

- **Daniel 4:34-37**—"But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom *endures* from generation to generation. <sup>35</sup> "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And *among* the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?' <sup>36</sup> At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me. <sup>37</sup> Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride."

Even when sinful men defy God, God's plans are never frustrated. God can foil, neutralize, invalidate, quash, annul, and invalidate the evil plans of nations, and bring to pass His own good purposes in your life and mine. God planned out everything that would happen in the history of the universe before He created the first day, and now everything goes according to His eternal and unchanging plan.

This is why the psalmist adds in verse 12,

- <sup>12</sup> Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,  
The people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance.

I remember first hearing a part of this verse on television as a boy as a part of a broadcasting channel here in Arizona. However, there are only two nations God has chosen for Himself, Israel and the church, and it's God's choice that determines the blessing and not anything in man. The nation whose God is the Lord is the nation He has chosen.

Listen, the first step toward salvation is not made by that person; it is made by God. Jesus said,

- **John 15:16**—You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.

What this means for us is we can have great confidence in our future because once God has chosen His people, He works sovereignly on their behalf! What joy, what comfort, what rest this affords us who are called by God to trust in Christ.

### 3. The Lord's EYE (vv.13-15)

Now the psalmist writes some of the most encouraging words to people who feel weak and vulnerable. The same God who rules nature and the nations loves His people.

- <sup>13</sup> The LORD looks from heaven;  
He sees all the sons of men;  
<sup>14</sup> From His dwelling place He looks out  
On all the inhabitants of the earth,  
<sup>15</sup> He who fashions the hearts of them all,  
He who understands all their works.

The image of God looking down and watching is not to be taken as if God is sitting back and passively allowing things to unfold in history. Rather, His omniscience is being emphasized by the four-fold use of the word "all" ("all the sons of men...all the inhabitants of the earth...He who fashions the heart of them all, He who understands all their works."). What is his point?

Yes, God is omniscient over all humanity, but in verse 18, the psalmist wants every believer to know that God's eye is upon them.

- <sup>18</sup> Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him,  
On those who hope for His lovingkindness.

One of the many differences between God and us is that we have different viewpoints. Take a parade, for example. We watch a parade progressively. We watch one band come after another. We watch the parade go by one float at a time. God sees the whole parade! He doesn't have to wait for each band to turn the corner or each float to roll by. From the start of it to the finish, God sees the whole parade.

That's why "*without faith it is impossible to please God*" (Heb.11:6). You've got to believe that He can see what you can't. You've got to believe that He sees what is not visible to you because you can't see around the corner, and the end as well as the beginning.

Why should I feel discouraged?  
Why should the shadows come?  
Why should my heart feel lonely  
And long for heaven and home  
When Jesus is my portion?  
My constant friend is He.  
His eye is on the sparrow,  
And I know He watches over me.<sup>2</sup>

Are you glad that the watchful eye of God is on you? If you are not in Christ, the thought of God's eye watching you is terrifying. It is frightening to know that your heart is open before Him—your desires are known to Him. But, to those who are in Christ, to those whose sins are covered by His blood, the thought of the Father's eye on you means that He can intervene in a timely way, like a father watching his children, so that he helps, counsels, redirects, and keeps you from wandering off on the wrong path.

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<sup>2</sup> Civilla D. Martin, *His Eye Is on the Sparrow*



Reason #1 to praise God—the Lord’s WORD

Reason #2 to praise God—the Lord’s PLAN

Reason #3 to praise God—the Lord’s EYE

#### 4. The Lord’s MIGHT (vv.16-19)

- <sup>16</sup> The king is not saved by a mighty army;  
A warrior is not delivered by great strength.  
<sup>17</sup> A horse is a false hope for victory;  
Nor does it deliver anyone by its great strength.  
<sup>18</sup> Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him,  
On those who hope for His lovingkindness,  
<sup>19</sup> To deliver their soul from death  
And to keep them alive in famine.

Verses 16-17 reveal that God’s might is more powerful than any nation’s army or human skill. Our hope for victory is not in superior numbers on the battlefield or in the bank account. The psalmist reminds us of God’s protection and God’s provision. It is as if he organizes this closing part of the psalm to help us reflect on the fact that God’s providential rule over the earth is not only for His glory, but the good of His people—protecting and providing—and no enemy or weapon formed against us shall prosper (*Is.54:17*).

As we reflect on God’s word, God’s plan, God’s eye, and God’s might, surely we see the picture of the puzzle more clearly. Just in case we don’t, Paul helps us in Romans 8:28-32,

- And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; <sup>30</sup> and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.  
<sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

Have you been spared severe illness during this past month? Not everyone has; we should be thankful and praise the LORD. Have you been spared from serious accidents? Not everyone has; we should be thankful and praise the LORD. Have you been delivered from the evil plans of the enemy to destroy your faith and your family? Not everyone has; we should be thankful and praise the LORD. Have you been given food, shelter, clothing, health, and many other necessities of life? Not everyone has; we should be thankful and praise the LORD.

#### CONCLUSION:

The conclusion of this wonderful psalm does not end without directing us as to what the Lord would have us do, how to do it, and why it is worth doing it like this.

- <sup>20</sup> Our soul waits for the LORD;  
He is our help and our shield.  
<sup>21</sup> For our heart rejoices in Him,  
Because we trust in His holy name.  
<sup>22</sup> Let Your lovingkindness, O LORD, be upon us,  
According as we have hoped in You.

- WAIT on the Lord.
- TRUST in the Lord.
- HOPE in the Lord.

In Spurgeon's Treasury of David, he credits a story to Edmund Calumy about a young boy who was at sea during a dangerous storm. The passengers were frightened and at their wits' end, but he was not disturbed at all. In fact, he was even cheerful. The others asked how he could be so cheerful when they seemed in danger of losing their lives. He replied that the captain of the ship was his father, and he knew his father would take care of him.

### **How can you know that God will take care of you?**

The New Testament answers—Jesus is the Word made flesh. The Lord's Word, the Eternal Word, *"became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14).

The Lord's plan is all centered in Christ. Paul said in Ephesians 1:9, *"He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His kind intention which He purpose in Christ."* Before God created the world or you, He thought of everything we could possibly need, and He let us in on the plans that everything would be brought together and summed up in Him. If you want to know God's plan for your life, it is in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are to live for.

The Lord's eye is upon us and there is no escaping His omnipresence and omniscience, but if you ever hope to see Him rightly and clearly, you don't need a *telescope*, or a *microscope* or a *horoscope*. *"In Him the fulness of deity dwells in bodily form"* (Col.2:9). Jesus said, *"He who has seen Me has seen the Father"* (John 14:9). And when you come to Christ, you realize that He is Lord, and life is empty and meaningless without Him.

Do you want to experience the Lord's might? It will not be something you figure out or achieve on your own. It is not a matter of being baptized or keeping a long list of laws or rules. No, but if you want to know God's deliverance in your life, you must believe the Gospel of Christ. Paul said, *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes"* (Rom.1:16). To believe is to obey. To believe is to repent. To believe is to commit the whole of your life to Him. To believe is to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him. The rich young ruler came to the right Person, asked the right question, then made the wrong choice because he refused to give up the idol of his heart and be saved. Don't make the same mistake. Come to Christ today, and you will have reasons to praise God every day. How can you know that God will take care of you? Because the entire universe has been made by His mere word and breath—and He cannot lie. His purposes cannot be thwarted by your own will or the will of your enemies. He governs the affairs of life and directs and orchestrates everything in life to bless, defend, preserve, and provide for you. No one who has ever trusted in Him has ever been disappointed (1 Pet.2:6).

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