

Living a Chocolate Life

SESSION 4 PROMISES

A CHOCOLATE SAMPLER

Check all that apply to you, and then discuss as a group:

- You live a chocolate life as you find satisfaction in Christ! (Share a tasty tidbit from the last session that really spoke to you, and enjoy a Memory Morsel moment.)*
- You consume dark chocolate regularly for its many promised health benefits.*
- You've received a chocolate facial, because chocolate's health benefits aren't limited to consumption.*
- You have been rewarded or paid in chocolate.*
- You search for healthier versions of chocolate recipes so you can indulge without guilt.*

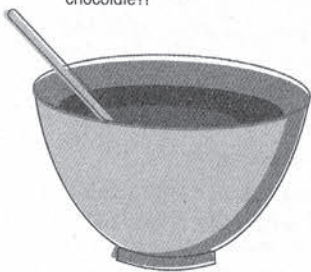
MEMORY MORSEL

"For all the promises of God find their Yes in Him [Christ]. That is why it is through Him that we utter our Amen to God for His glory." 2 Corinthians 1:20

Believing Promises

News Flash! "Dark Chocolate Declared Latest Health Food!" Research reveals evidence that dark chocolate can lower blood pressure and may reduce the risk of diabetes. It contains potent antioxidants too. Forget green tea and citrus fruits; I'm diving into dark chocolate. I'm purchasing eleven pounds

CHOCOLATE FUN FACT
Cacao beans were used as currency by the Mayans, the Aztecs, and in other parts of Latin America for centuries because they were considered so valuable. Can you imagine being paid in chocolate?!



✦ TAKE A BITE
Have you fallen for a deceptive or false promise, temporarily believing it because it sounded so good and you hoped to benefit from it?

As if it weren't enough that chocolate contains so much *promise* as we consume it, we're told that products made with chocolate are also beneficial when applied to our skin. Chocolate scrubs, facial masks, and lotions promise brighter, softer skin, enhanced by chocolate's antioxidants, which protect skin from sun damage, and caffeine, which promotes circulation and helps maintain skin's elasticity. What a promise!

People have been believing *promises* about chocolate for centuries. Two thousand years ago, the Mayans mixed ground cacao beans with bitter spices to make a drink that was believed to be a health elixir. In their culture, the cacao pods were believed to be "the food of the gods." The Aztecs believed the promise that wisdom and power could be attained through consumption of the beloved cacao bean.

of this new health food today. *Eleven pounds?* Yes, that's how much chocolate each American consumes on average in a year, and I'm way behind. I'm hoping to boost that average a bit. (Besides, if dark chocolate is good for me, wouldn't large quantities be *really* good for me?)

Ever notice how quickly we grab onto the latest promise, believing it because it sounds so good? "*Chocolate can be good for you*"?! Sure, there is some truth behind this chocolate research, but the promise of better health if we consume as much as possible seems deceptive, doesn't it? Oh, but what a worthy justification for overindulging! I can picture myself now, tossing boxes of chocolate into my shopping cart and justifying my immoderation to everyone near: "I'm investing in my health! The chocolate-covered cherries are mostly fruit! The nut-filled variety? Rich in plant protein! And the chocolate itself? Packed with everything that is heart-healthy!"

The Fine Print

We want to believe promises, especially those that may benefit us. But we don't want to read the fine print on our chocolate label: "*Warning! Contains saturated fat and sugar, known to cause weight gain and high blood pressure. Consume only small portions as part of a healthy diet.*" We want to believe so much that we ignore alarms about deceptive or even false promises. We like only the bold print of these claims: "*Look thirty years younger in just five weeks!*" (Thirty years younger than your mother, that is.) "*Drop twenty pounds by eating all the foods you crave!*" (As long as you crave only grapefruit and cabbage.) "*Get guaranteed financial freedom today!*" (Send us all your money, and you won't have any to fret over.)

We may laugh as we read the fine print of these deceptive promises, but there is another, and it's *real*. Also deceptive, and incomparably worse, was this one: "**Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'? . . . You will not surely die. . . [Yes, you will.] For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil**" [*You will fall into sin.*] (**Genesis 3:1, 4-5**). Some promise! Satan lied to Eve in the garden. Eve fell for it. In our resultant sin, we have been falling for his false promises ever since. Satan is the father of all lies, the great deceiver. He wants us to believe these deceptions. He would also have us believe that the promises this world offers us will always deliver. His goal is to take our eyes off the Lord and place our hope and trust in something, *anything* else.

Like every believer before us, as we come to the Lord with repentant hearts in the strength of the Spirit, we are forgiven for all the false promises for which we have fallen. Redeemed and renewed, we rejoice in the One who fulfills His *perfect* promises.

The Great Promise Giver

God is the Father of all truth, the Great Promise Giver. Scripture shows that He faithfully keeps all His promises. We see God's promises fulfilled to His chosen people throughout Scripture. Let's take a look at a sampling:

#1 dig in!

As you read the following passages of promise, record each of the Lord's promises that you find, as they are declared or fulfilled.

• Genesis 17:1–8, 15–16; 21:1–2

• Exodus 3:7–8, 16–17

• Joshua 21:43–45

#2 dig in!

God's long-promised provision of a Savior was first announced in the Garden of Eden (**Genesis 3:15**), was foretold for centuries by the prophets, and was perfectly fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Check out these promises in prophecies, which all point to Christ. (These, too, are just a sampling of the many messianic prophecies across the Old Testament.) What details are promised and foretold about the coming Savior? What's so significant about the recurring promise that He will reign with "*justice and righteousness*"?

• Psalm 89:3–4

• Isaiah 9:6–7; 53:3–6, 12

• Jeremiah 33:14–15

In the Book of Acts, the apostles proclaimed the risen Savior, Jesus, in these beautiful words declaring God's greatest promise fulfilled: "**Of this man's [David's] offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as He promised. . . . And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this He has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus**" (Acts 13:23, 32–33).

#3 dig in!

Read God's words of promise through the apostle Paul in **Romans 4:13–25**. What is the connection between God's promise to Abraham and to us? Who are Abraham's offspring? By faith, what did Abraham believe, and by that same faith, what do we believe? What was "counted to him" that will be "counted to us"?

By faith, we receive God's ultimate promise of eternal life in Christ! "**And this is the promise that He made to us—eternal life**" (1 John 2:25).

Delighted!

As I walked into the church, my eyes feasted upon dozens of tiered cupcake displays decorating an entire room in preparation for a *Living a Chocolate Life* women's retreat. I gazed upon creations with swirled, frosted tops in shades of cotton-candy pink, mint green, and chocolate brown, each complete with sprinkles. I giggled as I wondered if I would get to select from these mouthwatering choices. I was not disappointed! Intrigued by the mint-green frosted variety, I made my selection. The aroma wafted toward me, beckoning me to take my first bite. With paper peeled away, I sank my teeth into the little delicacy, fully expecting the taste and texture to please my palate. I was not disappointed. Much to my surprise, however, in the middle of my bite, hidden smack-dab in the center, was a fudgy, gooey, rich-and-creamy surprise center. Like a kid in a candy shop, this chocolate-loving lady was *delighted!*

We delight in any good thing that brings us pleasure. But nothing this world has to offer—not relationships, work, play, or food—can give us the full and lasting flavor we find when we delight ourselves in the Lord and His promises! "**Delight yourself in the LORD, and He will give you the desires of your heart**" (Psalm 37:4).

✦ TAKE A BITE

In what do you delight yourself? Maybe you take pleasure, as I do, in the sweet surprise filling of a favorite treat. Perhaps you revel in the love of your friends or the antics of your children. You thoroughly enjoy your work. You savor time set aside for your favorite hobby. You relish a gourmet meal or take delight in the decadent dessert that follows.



#4 dig in!

Find full and lasting flavor as you sink your teeth into these delights:

- Marvel at His creation every day as you rise. Stand in awe of the One who stretched the heavens and the earth. Pause in delight to read portions or all of **Genesis 1**.
- Praise the One who knit you together in your mother's womb and knows the very number of hairs on your head. Pause in wonder to read **Psalm 139:13** and **Matthew 10:30**.
- Find your greatest joy in Jesus, the one who died and rose for your sins! Rest in Him as you read **John 3:16**.
- Praise the name of the One who clothed you with Christ at your Baptism. Glorify Him as you read **Galatians 3:27**.

Do our mouths water for a heaping helping of His life-sustaining Word every day? Even when we fail to delight ourselves in Him, when we give greater priority to the delights of this world, God's rich mercy in Christ covers us, forgiving our failures and cleansing us from our sins.

The power of the Holy Spirit works in us as we grow in the Word and learn from Him, changing the desires of our hearts to fall in line with His

desires. (Read again **Psalm 37:4** above.) He delivers desire to place others' needs ahead of our own and serve them in sacrificial love. He increases our longing to share His saving grace with a world in need of a Savior. He gives us the yearning to grow in His Word. These are even more delightful than the surprise center of a delicately decorated cupcake.

#5 dig in!

By faith, we can delight in all the promises God has made to us, as we desire to grow in His Word. As a place to start, look up a few of His many promises in each of these areas. Choose at least one of the following verses to post as a reminder of God's promise to you of His presence; His protection over you; His provision for you; or the purpose for which He has prepared you.

- *Presence:* Deuteronomy 31:8; Psalm 139:1–18
- *Protection:* Psalm 18:2; Psalm 121
- *Provision:* Matthew 6:31–33; James 1:17
- *Purpose:* Ephesians 2:10; Hebrews 13:20–21

#6 dig in!

Talk about God's promises as you see them being fulfilled in your life. How have you been reminded of His continual presence? Where have you seen His protection? How has He provided for you? In what ways has He revealed His purpose to you?

God's Promises—Our Delight!

By the Spirit's leading, you can go to God's Word in eager anticipation. Pray that as He reveals truths and promises to you, they may guide you, give you His wisdom, fill you with discernment, and provide you with clear direction. As you read, take it slowly. Savor His words to you. Let them soak in. And dig deeper! Study the context surrounding the verse or passage. Learn the background, the culture, and the history leading up to it, as it applies to each passage.

Remember how dark chocolate holds so much promise? (I've even included a recipe for *Delightfully Dark Chocolate Oatmeal Cake [with Healthier Options]* for your benefit!) While we may delight in its velvety smooth texture, soak up its dark-chocolate flavor, and bask in the health benefits we hope to receive from *a chocolate life*, we delight much more in God's *perfect promises*, proclaimed in His Word and fulfilled in Christ. With joy, we take in every morsel of His truth. It fills and permeates us like nothing else can. **"Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart"** (Jeremiah 15:16).

#7 dig in!

a. Find these delicious words of promise, all within **Psalm 119**. Like Jeremiah, devour them! The psalmist asks confidently for each of these things because he is asking them of the Lord, **"according to Your promise"** (v. 41). The Lord has promised these things for us too! As you read each verse, may it become to you **"a joy and the delight of [your] heart."**

• Psalm 119:41

• Verse 58

• Verse 76

• Verse 116

• Verse 133

• Verse 154

b. Personalize each of the preceding promises to your life and circumstances right now and take each to the Lord in prayer, confident that as you approach His throne of grace (see **Hebrews 4:16**) in the name of Jesus, He promises to answer according to His perfect will.

From the first promise given to the first sinners in the garden, to Abraham who received God's promises by faith, to Moses, to the prophets, and to all of God's people who yearned for the promised Messiah, to every promise recorded across the Scriptures, all of God's perfect promises point to the One in whom they are all fulfilled. Christ. The Messiah. Our Savior. **"For all the promises of God find their Yes in him [Christ]. That is why it is through Him that we utter our Amen to God for His glory"** (2 Corinthians 1:20). (*Memory Morsel*)

*Living a Chocolate Life, we delight in
God's perfect promises, proclaimed
in His Word and fulfilled in Christ!*

PRAYER

Sweet Supplication

Father God, thank You for the promise of salvation that is mine in Christ! Give me Your strength to trust in all Your promises. Thank You for the many good pleasures in my life, in which I delight. Lead me to take greatest delight in You each day! Make my desires Yours, Lord. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Delightfully Dark Chocolate Oatmeal Cake or Cupcakes (with Healthier Options)

- 1¼ c. boiling water
- 1 c. oatmeal
- ½ c. butter (*Healthier Option*: substitute ½ c. applesauce)
- 4 oz. dark chocolate (at least 70 percent cacao)
- 1½ c. flour (*Healthier Option*: substitute whole wheat flour)
- 1 tsp. baking soda (increase to 1½ tsp. if using whole wheat flour)
- 1 c. packed brown sugar
- 1 c. sugar
- ½ tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 3 eggs

Rich Chocolate Frosting (page 22); *Healthier Option*: powdered sugar

Pour boiling water over oatmeal, butter (or applesauce), and chocolate; stir. Let stand 15 minutes. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour a 9 x 13-inch cake pan. Combine all remaining ingredients except *Frosting* with oatmeal mixture and beat until thoroughly combined. Pour into prepared pan. Bake 35 to 40 minutes. Cool. Frost with *Rich Chocolate Frosting* (or sprinkle with powdered sugar). *Cupcakes*: Scoop batter into paper-lined cupcake pans and bake 18 to 20 minutes. Makes 24.

CHOCOTIVITY

Chocolate Spa Event

Dark chocolate offers health *promises* not only when consumed, but also when applied to the skin, as you learned in today's session. Mix up this recipe for a pampering activity during or following Bible study discussion. (As an alternative, invite others for a chocolate spa event and share a sampling of God's perfect *promises* by reading selections from the *Living a Chocolate Life* devotion book or straight out of this session. Provide samples of your favorite dark chocolate treats too!) Search the Internet for additional chocolate spa recipes and ideas.

REFRESHING CHOCOLATE HAND/BODY SCRUB

- 1 tbsp. sugar
- 3 tbsp. unsweetened baking cocoa
- 1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
- 3 tbsp. honey
- 3 tbsp. extra virgin olive oil

Blend all ingredients to form a paste. Scrub a small amount gently onto your skin. Rinse with warm water. Delight in the aroma as this scrub leaves skin smooth and rejuvenated! Apply rich cocoa-butter moisturizer as desired. Refrigerate remaining scrub in an airtight plastic container.