**16th March 2025**

**Call to worship**

Come, let us remember the promises of God,
**who keeps his promises for ever.**
God created and cares for all living creatures,
**and keeps his promises for ever.**
God sent to us his Son Jesus,
**and keeps his promises for ever.**
God lives among us through the Holy Spirit,
**and keeps his promises for ever.**

**A gathering prayer**

Loving God, we gather today
to explore your promise to always
have our best interests at heart.
Help us as we think about the promises we make too.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of approach**

The Lord is our light, now and always.
Come, gaze upon his beauty.
Let us seek and sing of his faithful goodness.
Let us raise the roof with our music to the Lord.

**A prayer of adoration**

We adore you, Lord.
You promise to protect:
**now and always.**
You promise to keep us safe and secure:
**now and always.**
You promise to teach us:
**now and always.**
You promise to be our guide and helper:
**now and always.**
We adore you, Lord, and look to you in all things:
**now and always.**
We adore you, Lord:
**and trust in what is now and what is not yet seen.**
**Amen.**

**A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness**

**A prayer of confession**

Lord, you gave Abraham a promise
that seemed far-fetched at first,
yet you confirmed it in holy visions.
Lord, we are sorry when we fail to believe in your promises,
when we think we must have heard you wrong.
**Forgive us for doubting and not trusting enough.**
Help us to have faith like Abraham and deepen our trust in you,
knowing that your promises may not have been fulfilled yet.
**Forgive us when we lose heart.**
Help us to wait upon you and bless us with faith
that nothing can shake.
**Amen.**

**Assurance of forgiveness**

Father God, you fulfilled your promise of a Saviour
in your Son Jesus Christ,
who grants forgiveness of sin.
We are forgiven.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of praise**

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we praise you for this day.
We thank you for the many ways you speak to us:
through your Word, visions, dreams and other people.
Thank you that you see the bigger picture –
you see the whole story from start to finish.
Each day for us is a new page in life’s book,
revealing ups and downs,
promises for now and for what is yet to come.
Thank you that unwavering trust in you banishes
all dark shadows and uncertainties.
Help us to walk in faith.
**All praise to you Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**
**Amen.**

**As numerous as the stars in the sky W E S**

**Reflect on how Abram felt on hearing God’s promise**

* With the group, watch [*God’s Promise for Abraham*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUhs-MWoTbg%20https://shop.verlagsgruppe-patmos.de/abraham-die-nacht-von-hebron-618861.html), Saddleback Kids, to recap the story of Abraham.
* Ask the young people: What does it mean to say your descendants will be ‘as numerous as the stars’? How do you think Abram felt about it? How would you feel about it?
* Look at Sieger Köder’s, ‘Abraham. The Night of Hebron’ – this powerful artwork captures Abram’s response to God’s promise. Use the ‘translate’ feature on your browser to read an accompanying devotion by Theo Schmidkonz.
* Talk together about the promises God gives us, for now and the future. What is our response to these? What can these promises tell us about what God is like and how we should approach the future?
* Looking up at the sky as an elderly, childless man, Abram must have felt that in human terms it was pretty unlikely he would become father to a great nation, with descendants as numerous as the stars. It was a moonshot, an impossible, or nearly impossible, dream. But with God all things are possible. Despite his doubts, Abram kept on in faith.
	+ Which of God’s promises to you feel like moonshots?
	+ Do you bring your struggles with waiting to God in prayer like Abram?
	+ Are you surprised to see that God is faithful despite Abram’s doubts along the way?

God already knows what’s on our minds and can take our honest questioning!

* Do you sometimes feel that there are no promises for you? Many of us never feel we’re given a promise as specific as those given to Abram but we can still stand firm in the promises made to all believers. Have a look through Jesus’ words in the gospels and you’ll soon find some. Which can you remember? If you’re struggling, start by reminding yourself of John 3.16 and Matthew 6.25-31. Which promise do you need to hold on to this week?

**Genesis 15.1-18**

Promises, promises! If you hadn’t heard the phrase before, you might not realise it isn’t an expression of trust but quite the opposite. We’re so sceptical about the promises made by others that you just have to double the word and add a twist to your tone to perfectly express your cynicism. When politicians run for election we scrutinise their manifestos and, if they make it into office, it’s common journalistic practice to track [how well they measure up](https://www.politico.com/trump-first-100-days-second-term) in their [first 100 days](https://inews.co.uk/news/labour-first-100-days-policy-expect-next-3321026). Did they keep their promises?

Sometimes there are successes but often the answer is no, not quite, or not yet. A promising performer may not live up to people’s high expectations as their career continues. An architect’s beautiful drawings for that new development aren’t always realised in full or on time. Your ambition to catch a glimpse of something special in the night sky might be frustrated by the weather. The hopeful early days of a new romance may lead to nothing.

Given our day-to-day experiences of human fallibility, it’s perhaps no wonder if, like Abram, we sometimes find it hard to trust in God. Promised many descendants (Genesis 13.15-16), Abram now pleads with God “I continue childless” (15.2), “You have given me no offspring” (15.3) and “how am I to know” (15.8). He can see the pain of the now more clearly than the hope of the not-yet. And yet, after much waiting, to the point of near-hopeless laughter, in Genesis 21 Sarah finally gives birth to their son, Isaac. Our God *is* a faithful God! Even so, God’s timing can take time to understand.

Looking up at the sky as an elderly, childless man, Abram must have felt that in human terms it was pretty unlikely he would become father to a great nation, with descendants as numerous as the stars. It was a moonshot, an impossible, or nearly impossible, dream. But with God all things are possible. Despite his doubts, Abram kept on in faith.

Manifestation is popular today..[[1]](#endnote-1)

Named the word of 2024 by the [Cambridge Dictionary](https://licc.us5.list-manage.com/track/click?u=2d890204e49f49d788e3a0b12&id=5e545d93b9&e=51b73bcdc1), it’s currently trending on TikTok with [230 million+ posts](https://licc.us5.list-manage.com/track/click?u=2d890204e49f49d788e3a0b12&id=eff92aa68a&e=51b73bcdc1). Is it a New Age cult? A quick Google search say Proponents argue it’s visualising hopes and ambitions, speaking them out loud, and taking active steps to turn them into reality. In the words of Gabrielle Bernstein, it’s ‘co-creating, a collaboration between you and the universe’.\*

This desire to co-create is an essential facet of our humanity. No wonder our colleagues, friends, and family members want to be co-creators, too.

Co-creation is a way in which we [image God](https://licc.us5.list-manage.com/track/click?u=2d890204e49f49d788e3a0b12&id=e77f2e07f0&e=51b73bcdc1) and fulfil his creation mandate (Genesis 1:27–28). Under his sovereignty and within the bounds of creation, we’re called to be his hands and feet, making objects, cultures, and communities suffused with his shalom (Ephesians 2:10). That might look like composing beautiful music, refusing to overbill clients, calling out sexist comments, paying employees living wage, leading with radical humility, or laying bricks with perfect precision.

We’re living in a culture that’s increasingly open to the spiritual realm and disillusioned with this broken world. The Bible is abundantly clear that we’re not to turn to mediums (Leviticus 19:31), and that acting as if we can be like God without God has destructive consequences (Genesis 3:1–7). But that doesn’t mean we should avoid conversations about spiritual practices that, however confused, resonate with who God made us to be.

So, carefully listen to and engage with the supernatural yearnings of those around you. When a friend tells you they manifested physical healing, share that you prayed to the God who gave sight to the blind and made a lame man walk – and you believe this miraculous healing was, in fact, a gift from him.

Tell them that, whilst Jesus doesn’t promise health, through his resurrection we have certain hope that all things will be perfectly restored. And what’s more, empowered by his Spirit, we have the privilege of bringing glimpses of this perfect harmony into the present. Then invite them to co-create this beautiful future – not through abstract powers of the universe but with the God of all things.

Scripture tells us of a God who is there and who encounters us in our everyday lives.

A God who helps us dream of what could be. A God who helps us face our fears about what could be. A God who shields us and rewards us with good life. This is the God that Abraham encountered and how it changed his life.

What are you hoping for?

What dream has God given you? Can you see God helping you overcome your family problems, your financial problems...do you have educational dreams for your self or your children? Is there a dream for your job that lies unfulfilled? Do you dream of God using you in a bigger way? Do you long for family and friends to come to faith in Christ?

Believe these great words of God today: "Don’t be afraid, I am your shield; your very great reward.’ Gen 15.1

William Carrey, considered by many to be the human catalyst behind the modern missions movement, used to say, "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God."
If you once dreamed big for God but have become discouraged about whether or not those dreams can still be realized, this story of Abraham should help you dream again.

Our text verse is unique because it contains the first mention in the Bible of two very important words: "vision" and "reward".
Genesis 15:1 (NIV) "After this the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision and said to him, ’Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, and your great reward.’"

This verse contains FOUR ESSENTIAL ATTITUDES FOR FULFILLING YOUR GOD-GIVEN DREAM:

**1. Realize that your dream will need to be tested.**

The first word of our text verse deserves further investigation. "After this". After what? What had been happening in the life of Abram up to this point? Let’s quickly review the three preceding chapters of scripture.

In Genesis chapter twelve God calls Abram to leave his home at age 75. So he sets out, not even knowing the precise location of the Promised Land to which God is sending him. Shortly thereafter Abram finds himself in the midst of a famine. He’s forced to take his family, servants, flocks and herds into Egypt. While he’s there he lies about his wife being his sister so that Pharaoh won’t kill him. Pharaoh takes Sarai into his harem but God protects her in spite of Abram’s deception and she is returned to Abram.

This character flaw of Abram’s is not covered up in Scripture. One of the many reasons we know the Bible is trustworthy is that it "tells it like it is".

Abram was weak. He lied. There’s no excuse for his lying. Yet Abram did not stop his journey to obey God because of his own sinful failure.

So we see in Genesis twelve that Abram’s dream was tested by FAMINE and FAILURE.

In Genesis chapter thirteen, Abram separates from his nephew Lot because of a conflict between their herdsmen. There wasn’t enough grazing land for both their sets of herds and flocks. So Abram lets Lot take his pick of land on which to graze and Lot chooses foolishly. Sure, he picked the lush land, but it was also connected to the wicked city of Sodom. Eventually, Lot inches his way into the city. His family life is devastated because he chose the wrong priorities in life.

Abram could have taken first pick due to seniority. Instead he was selfless.

Don’t be so sure that just because you can do something that you should do the thing.

So in Genesis thirteen we see that Abram’s vision was tested by CONFLICT.

In Genesis chapter fourteen Abram rescues Lot from being taken captive. The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, where Lot and his family had been living, lost their battle to a group of Babylonian kings. As a consequence Lot and his family were among the people taken hostage - probably to become slaves.

Uncle Abram puts together an army of his servants and rescues Lot and his family and all the other people and goods claimed by the heathen kings.

The King of Sodom offers for Abram to keep the spoils of the battle he had just won. (v.21) (It seems rich to me that this king offers Abram something he lost in battle and Abram regained.)

 Abram refused the offer because he did not want the King of Sodom to ever be able to say, "I made Abram rich." (v.23)

Abram wanted everyone to know that it was his God, not any man, that blessed him. He was able to refuse material goods based on principle.

So we see, Abram’s vision was not only tested by FAMINE, FAILURE, and CONFLICT, but also by WARFARE and PROSPERITY.

That’s the stuff that comes before the AFTER THIS.

(AFTER THIS, the LORD spoke to Abram in a vision...)

Do you see the pattern?

AFTER Abram stepped out by faith and left his homeland.

AFTER he’d been through the famine.

AFTER he’d embarassed himself by lying to the King of Egypt.

AFTER he’d had the dissension with his family member, Lot.

AFTER he’d fought and won the battle with the Babylonian kings.

AFTER he passed the test with his possessions.

AFTER THOSE TESTS...God appeared to him in a vision.

A lot of us would have given up AFTER having gone through just one of these tests.

And that is the reason why many dreams from God never materialize - we give up too soon.

When we realize our dreams must be tested we can have a better attitude about those tests and a positive attitude is essential for realizing our dreams.

Those who see their God-given dreams fulfilled are the ones who persevere through tough times. They are the people who refuse to quit. Their tenacity and perseverance win out. They’re like Jacob wrestling with God, refusing to quit until they’ve received God’s blessing.

This is the biggest difference between winners and losers in every field. In business, sports, marriage and family life - many succeed because they have a right attitude about their tests.

People who fulfill their God-given dreams aren’t always the most brilliant, not always the most talented, not always the better skilled. They don’t always have the best resources at their disposal. They’re just people who refuse to let go of their dream.

God’s will through the Patriarchs or any other saint, was not realized overnight. It took years of testing and moulding and refining.

But why do I have to be tested to realize God’s dream?

Maybe God can’t give his dreams to people whose minds are cluttered with other things. Our tests and trials are not meant to discourage us - they are meant to draw us closer to God – to sort out our priorities, to refine our faith.

Tests can be God’s pruning shears.

John 15:1-2 (CEV) "Jesus said to his disciples:’I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts away every branch of mine that doesn’t produce fruit. But he trims clean every branch that does produce fruit, so that it will produce even more fruit.’"

It’s tempting when the road is smooth and the sun is shining to think you’re doing it all without God’s help. But of course, you’re not. Without Him we couldn’t do anything. Having our dreams tested helps us remember that.

Abram was to the point where God could say, "Abram, I want to talk to you about something", and Abram was prepared to listen.

It was AFTER THIS. After the storms of life.

A young naval student was being put through the paces by an old sea captain. "What would you do if a sudden storm sprang up on the starboard?"
"Throw out the anchor, sir."
"What would you do if another storm sprang up aft?"
"Throw out another anchor, sir."
"And if another terrific storm sprang up forward, what would you do?"
"Throw out another anchor."

"Hold on", said the captain. "Where are you getting all your anchors from?"
"From the same place you’re getting your storms, sir."

You don’t have to worry whether or not God has enough anchors for your storms!

Abram passed the tests so God gave him vision.

The first attitude to realizing your God-given dream: realize your dream will be tested. And then...

**2. Remember that God offers reassurance. "The LORD spoke to Abram in a vision."**

"No one has ever seen God." (1 John 4:2; John 1:18)
"God is Spirit." (John 4:24) He is not contained in a physical body - except, of course, for the time Jesus took on human form. So when God spoke to people in Bible times He often had to do it in vision fashion.

In this story there is also the rite, whereby an animal is divided in two and the covenant makers walk between the divided animal and thereby invoke death upon themselves should they be unfaithful to the terms of the covenant. In this story just God passes through the divided animal to give the promise to Abram.

There wasn’t a Bible available in Abram’s day. He couldn’t turn to the book of Genesis. So God speaks to him through a vision and through this rite.

Don’t ever forget how much God wants to communicate with humanity. He communicates to us through creation and conscience. (Romans 1) And He communicates through the Word of God, both written and Living.

Some object that they can’t be visionaries because God hasn’t spoken to them in a vision like he did Abram.

In many ways we have it better than Abraham had it? God will speak to you every day if you will read His Word! We have much more revelation from God than Abram ever dreamed of having.

And what will happen when you hear from God? Many great things, one of which is, you will be able to face your fears. Fear is the greatest enemy to realizing your God-given dreams. Fear is a dream killer.

That’s why God’s communication to Abram included this next attitude.

**3. Replace fear with faith. "Do not be afraid, Abram, I will protect you."**
What might Abram be afraid of at this point in his life?
The retribution of the Babylonian kings he had defeated in battle? The wrath of the King of Egypt for lying about his wife? No, Abram had already survived those tests.
The greatest of Abram’s tests was the test of his faith.

God had promised to make him great and make him the head of a great nation. (Gen. 12:2) You know the problem...Abram and Sarai were old and childless. How could God possibly hope to fulfill His promise to Abram now?

Abram believed the Lord (Genesis 15:6), but he still wondered "how" God was going to fulfill His promise.

Abram suggested to God that his trusted servant Eliezer of Damascus become his heir. (Genesis 15:3) Sarai’s plan was for Abram to father a child by her Egyptian servant Hagar. (Genesis 16:1-2)

Both plans missed the mark. Both alternatives were motivated by fear.

But God wanted Abram’s child to be a child of faith, not fear.
"Don’t be afraid, Abram. Just because it is humanly impossible doesn’t mean it is Divinely impossible!"

So, the third essential attitude - replace your fear with faith.

The fourth essential attitude for realizing your God-given dreams...

**4. Recognize that a great reward awaits you.**

Genesis 15:1 this way, "I am your shield, and your great reward." (Which, in itself is a great truth - our reward is getting to have a relationship with God, not just the realization of our dreams!)

The Hebrew word for "shield" is often translated figuratively to denote protection - which, of course, is what a shield is for. Specifically, it is for protection in battle.

But once again, the battle in which God wanted to protect Abram was not a physical one - it was spiritual.

Ephesians 6:12-13 (CEV) "We are not fighting against humans. We are fighting against forces and authorities and against rulers of darkness and powers in the spiritual world. 13 So put on the armour that God gives. Then when that evil day comes, you will be able to defend yourself. And when the battle is over, you will still be standing firm."

And what is the shield in our God-given armour?

Ephesians 6:16 (CEV) "Let your faith be like a shield, and you will be able to stop all the flaming arrows of the evil one."

In order to win the spiritual battle involving the realization of our God-given dreams we will have to believe what we cannot see.

Hebrews 11:9-10 (Msg) "By an act of faith, he (Abraham) lived in the country promised him, lived as a stranger camping in tents... Abraham did it by keeping his eye on an UNSEEN city with real, eternal foundations - the City designed and built by God."

Walt Disney’s widow was being interviewed after the completion of Disney World in Florida. The reporter remarked, "Isn’t it a shame that your husband never got to see this?" Mrs Disney quickly corrected him. "He did see it. That is why it is here!"

People who keep their eyes on the prize get to see what others cannot see.

Abraham was one of those people.

Will you be one?

1. Realize your dream will be tested.
2. Remember God offers reassurance. You’re not in this thing alone!
3. Replace any fear you might have with faith.
4. Recognize the great reward that awaits you for fulfilling your God-given dream.

What dream has God given you? Do you long for family and friends to come to faith in Christ? Never stop dreaming that dream!

Can you see God helping you overcome your family problems, your financial problems...do you have educational dreams for your self or your children? Is there a dream for your job that lies unfulfilled? Do you dream of God using you in a bigger way?

Believe these great words of God today: "Don’t be afraid, I am your shield your great reward."

Never give up on your God-given dream!

**Prayers of intercession**

Lord, as we wait for your promises to be fulfilled,
**help us to keep trusting your faithfulness.**

Heavenly Father, as we look at the state of our world we sometimes start to wonder. When we focus our attention on incredible suffering in Africa; the devastation of so much of the Middle East; the continued war in Ukraine and the fragile attempts for a ceasefire, we often fail to understand. We are tempted to ask: Are you still in control?

Lord, we do not have the answers. Yet you have invited us to pray. And so we come, offering our faltering prayers to you - believing, even if only a little bit at times, that you are listening and you will act. We bring the many, many needs of the world to you now -those we see in the news and those seen only by you. You see the pain and you see the suffering and yet we know, and we trust, that you are Lord.

Lord, as we wait for your promises to be fulfilled,
**help us to keep trusting your faithfulness.**

Lord of the universe, thank you for all the beauty in our world. We think of the new growth blooming at the start of spring. We are amazed by the incredible night sky, the stars, the planets: everything we can see and everything that is beyond our comprehension. All of it crafted by your hands. All of it upheld by you. Lord, as we look at the stars, help us to remember your promise to Abram and your promises to us. Abram never saw the full fruit of the promises and yet he carried on following your word. We may not understand, we may be confused but help us, whenever we see the night sky, to remember that you are a faithful God.

Lord, as we wait for your promises to be fulfilled,
**help us to keep trusting your faithfulness.**

Lord, sometimes our problems and troubles seem insurmountable. We can’t see a way through. We can’t understand why. We think of those we know who are in pain; awaiting a diagnosis; struggling with anxiety and depression; facing a long, hard road to recovery; and those who are mourning the loss of a loved one; a job; an opportunity; those who live on the edge of society.

Lord, we don’t know why and sometimes we’re afraid to ask in case you think we are losing our faith. But we know that when times are tough we need you more than ever. We need to cling tightly to you just as you hold us firmly and safely in your arms. Help us to trust that, even if the now is really, really hard, the not yet will be good because you are a good God. Lord, we believe. Help our unbelief.

Lord, as we wait for your promises to be fulfilled,
**help us to keep trusting your faithfulness.**

Father, we pray for our community. We think of those places that seem dark or dangerous. We pray for the places that we would rather not go through. And we think of the places that give us pleasure. We pray for those who work in our community and we pause to think of our neighbours, those we meet on the bus, in our office, our classroom, in the park as we walk the dog. Lord, you are Lord of all these people and places whether we recognise it or not. You have a plan for our community. Help us to listen for the part you want us to play in bringing that plan to fruition. Give us the courage, as a church and as individual people of God, to tell others of your amazing faithfulness and love. Draw people to your light, we pray and fill our streets with your praise.

Lord, as we wait for your promises to be fulfilled,
**help us to keep trusting your faithfulness.**

Lord we thank you for the times when we have glimpses of your glory; when we have seen your promises coming true even when we didn’t expect it. We think of all the good things that have happened to us or our families this week and we pause to smile. We thank you for good news stories; for those unexpected moments of joy, maybe from people we don’t normally have much to do with; for fun; for laughter; for a job well done. We thank you that you are with us in these small moments as well as the life-changing situations.

As we prepare to go into the coming week, help us to look forward to travelling with you. Go before us, Lord, and light our way. Help us to see you in the trivial and the timeless; in the life-changing and the mundane. Keep us from following our own feeble footsteps but instead lead us on and take us where you are going, Lord. Surprise us with your presence; startle us with answers to our unspoken prayers; bring us back here next week with stories to tell of your goodness.

Lord, as we wait for your promises to be fulfilled
**Help us to keep trusting your faithfulness and to keep following your wonderful, winding, challenging path.**

**Amen**

**A prayer for all ages together**

Faithful God, as we leave this place,
help us to trust your promises,
*(place hands over heart)*
even when it’s hard.
Loving God, as we go out into the world,
*(move arms around in a big circle)*
help us to keep our promises to others
*(extend arms out towards those either side)*
and bless all that we do.
**Amen.**

**A sending out prayer**

Lord, you have kept your promises to your people throughout the ages.
Send us out with renewed confidence
that you are faithful to your Word.
Help us to see signs that you are at work in our lives
and the wider world this week.
In Jesus’ name.
**Amen.**

*Using material from Brian Atwood, ‘fulfilling your God given dream’ www.sermoncentral.com*

1. *Sophie is Marketing & Comms Lead at LICC and regularly writes on relationships.*

\*Gabrielle Bernstein, [*Super Attractor: Methods for Manifesting a Life Beyond Your Wildest Dreams*](https://licc.us5.list-manage.com/track/click?u=2d890204e49f49d788e3a0b12&id=3992e316e8&e=51b73bcdc1) (Hay House, 2019), xii.A [↑](#endnote-ref-1)