

AUGUST 24TH, 2026

WHAT NOT WHEN

God Tells Us What His Promises Are, Not When They'll Arrive

For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.

— HABAKKUK 2:3 (ESV)

I was sitting in service yesterday listening to a theologian — or a pastor, I honestly couldn't tell you which — working his way through his doctoral-level lesson on the end times out of Matthew 24. My fiancée and her son were with me. When it was over, her son leaned over and said, “That was the longest hour and a half of my life!”

He's twelve. He's new to church. So we give him some grace — but I'll be honest, my fiancée and I both agreed it was the most boring sermon we'd heard all year. The man was all over the Bible, I assume trying to connect every dot he could find to prove his point about when the end times would come. But it got me thinking about how we pray, and how we lead our lives, chasing a when without ever settling into the what of God's promises. So I want to try and spell that out for you.

A WHEN WE PRAYED FOR

When my first wife and I were trying to have kids, we prayed the promises of God over our lives, asking Him to deliver us a little girl. When my wife and I got married, she already had a son named Michael Lee. He was ten, and I became an answer to his own prayer, because he'd never had a dad. A few years later, we adopted another young man, Michael Leonard. He was homeless, and we took him in. So we had two boys — seventeen and eighteen by then — and we were trying hard to have one together too.

But my wife had endometriosis, badly enough that she'd had a tube removed, and doctors told us our only real option was IVF — money we didn't have. God, being God, blessed us with a pregnancy not long after her final surgery to deal with the endometriosis. We wanted a girl but chose not to find out the sex, and waited. We argued over names — she wanted Grace, I wanted Nicole — but we agreed on Noah Luke if it turned out to be a boy. Lo and behold, it was a boy. The doctors had said it wasn't possible. We had our miracle.

Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.

— GENESIS 18:14 (ESV)

HEDGING OUR BET

While we were pregnant, we also went through CPS trying to adopt a little girl — hedging our bet, you might say, on the promise we'd first prayed. After eleven months of hits and misses, we finally got Gabby on Good Friday, 2007. She was the spitting image of Dora the Explorer. She'd come out of foster care hurt — a broken collarbone, her arm in a sling — and she could barely sleep most nights, crying about a brother and sister she'd left behind.

Gabby was three when she arrived in our home. CPS hadn't told us she had siblings still in the system, but we asked, and we pushed, and we reunited the sibling group: Gabby, three. Sophia, five. Michael, eight. Yes — Michael. That makes three Michaels in this story, if you're counting.

It took about a year to finalize the adoption. And when we finally stood in that courthouse, we found out the blessing God had already laid on our hearts long before we ever knew it.

THE NAMES WE DIDN'T KNOW

In court that day, we were asked whether the kids wanted to change their names. But more importantly, we were told their full legal names for the very first time.

Gabriel Grace.

Sophia Nicolette.

Michael Angel.

God knew we were meant to be Grace's parents, and Nicole's parents, all along — the two names we'd argued over years earlier, waiting on a promise we thought was about one little girl. He'd already written both of them into our family before we ever filled out a single form. And He added an Angel, just to prove His point.

WHAT NOT WHEN

Here's what I keep coming back to. We prayed for a girl. God gave us a boy first, one nobody thought was medically possible, and then He gave us three more children we didn't even know existed yet — carrying names we'd already chosen without knowing it. We were praying for a when. God was working out a what.

That pastor spent ninety minutes trying to pin down a timeline Scripture never promises us. But the promise was never the calendar. The promise was the

character — that God is faithful, that He hears, that He provides, that what He starts He finishes, in His timing and not ours. Habakkuk was told the vision would tarry, and to wait for it anyway, because it would surely come. Not when. Just that it would, and that it wouldn't lie.

My fiancée's son was bored out of his mind by a sermon chasing a when. I spent a decade and a half living out a what I couldn't have written myself — Grace and Nicole and an Angel, delivered in an order and a shape I never would have guessed, right on time anyway.



A PRAYER FOR THE WAITING

Lord, forgive us for chasing the calendar when You've already given us the promise. Thank You for the things You said You would do, even when we couldn't see how or when You'd do them. Thank You for a miracle baby doctors said wasn't possible, and for children we didn't know we were praying for until we held their real names in our hands. Teach us to wait the way Habakkuk waited — certain of the what, patient about the when. And where we're still waiting on something You've promised, remind us it will surely come. It will not delay. Amen.

SIT WITH IT

1. Where in your life have you been praying for a when instead of trusting the what God already promised?
2. Has God ever answered a prayer in a shape you didn't expect — giving you something you needed before you knew to ask for it?
3. Who in your family carries a story of God's timing that doesn't look like anyone planned it?
4. Habakkuk was told the vision would tarry but would not lie. What promise are you still waiting on, and what would it look like to wait on it well?
5. What's one place where chasing when has cost you the peace of simply trusting what?

The Promises of God

What Not When

A working list, by category, of what God has promised — and the case for why we're given the what, and not the when.

Promises of Presence

- *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."* — **Hebrews 13:5**
- *"Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* — **Matthew 28:20**
- *"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you."* — **Isaiah 43:2**

Promises of Provision

- *"And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."* — **Philippians 4:19**
- *"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want."* — **Psalms 23:1**
- *"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."* — **Matthew 6:33**

Promises of Forgiveness and Salvation

- *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* — **1 John 1:9**
- *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."* — **John 3:16**
- *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* — **Romans 8:1**

Promises of Guidance and Wisdom

- *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding... he will make straight your paths."* — **Proverbs 3:5-6**
- *"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."* — **James 1:5**
- *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you."* — **Psalms 32:8**

Promises of Purpose

- *"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."* — **Jeremiah 29:11**
- *"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."* — **Romans 8:28**
- *"He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."* — **Philippians 1:6**

Promises of Rest and Peace

- *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."* — **Matthew 11:28**
- *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you."* — **John 14:27**
- *"You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you."* — **Isaiah 26:3**

Promises of Restoration

- *"I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten."* — **Joel 2:25**
- *"Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning."* — **Psalms 30:5**
- *"Behold, I am making all things new."* — **Revelation 21:5**

Promises to the Faithful Under Trial

- *"God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape."* — **1 Corinthians 10:13**
- *"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness."* — **James 1:2-3**
- *"Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life."* — **James 1:12**

Promises of God's Return / Ultimate Hope

- *"I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."* — **John 14:3**
- *"For still the vision awaits its appointed time... if it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay."* — **Habakkuk 2:3**
- *"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you."* — **2 Peter 3:9**

WHY WE'RE GIVEN THE WHAT, NOT THE WHEN

Scripture is consistent on this — almost stubbornly so:

Deuteronomy 29:29 — *"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever."* The timeline is filed under "secret things." The promise itself is what's been handed to us.

Matthew 24:36 — *"But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only."* This is Jesus, in the very passage that pastor was working through, shutting down the search for a date before it starts.

Acts 1:7 — *"It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority."* He doesn't rebuke the question's sincerity — He just relocates it. That information was never given to be found.

2 Peter 3:8-9 — *"With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day... he is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."* God's sense of timing isn't slowness — it's a different scale entirely, aimed at people, not calendars.

James 5:7-8 — *"Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains."* Farming is the model: you don't know the exact day the grain ripens, but you know it will, because you know the nature of the seed and the God who made it grow.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 — *"He has made everything beautiful in its time... he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end."* Even the search for the timetable is described as something we can't complete — not because God is hiding it maliciously, but because it was never ours to hold.

The pattern underneath all of it: God binds Himself to His character — faithful, present, forgiving, restoring — never to a schedule. The promise is the fixed point. The calendar is the variable He keeps for Himself. That's the whole case for "What Not When" in one line: certainty of the what is exactly what makes patience about the when bearable.

IF WE WERE GIVEN THE WHEN

So why not just tell us? If God gave us the when in life, we wouldn't know how to trust Him — and more importantly, we wouldn't be able to honor His blessings the way they deserve to be honored. A when turns faith into a countdown. You stop walking with God and start watching the clock, and the moment the promise arrives, it feels less like a gift and more like a delivery you were owed.

God gives us the what in life to give us hope in Jesus, and in the trials and tribulations, He has promised to stand by us through them. The what is what keeps you on your knees between now and then. The when would only ever get you to the finish line — the what is what teaches you to run the race.



— BIGTOP