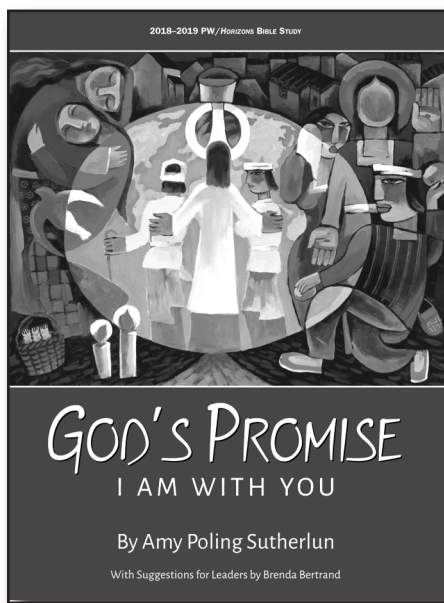


God's Promise: I Am with You

2018–2019 Presbyterian Women/*Horizons* Bible Study by Amy Poling Sutherland

Workshop for Leaders

By Amy Poling Sutherland



Welcome to the 2018–2019 Presbyterian Women/*Horizons* Bible study, *God's Promise: I Am with You*. In nine lessons, this study traces God's recurring promise of presence from Genesis through the Gospels—from the beginning to the end of the age. God's "I am with you" promise is spoken in varied circumstances and to many different people throughout scripture. Some instances may be quite familiar, while others might surprise you.

Throughout this study, participants will reflect on how the promise of God's presence speaks beyond the pages of the Bible, to their own circumstances. Individually and as a community, we will be encouraged to both see and seek God's presence with us in the extraordinary and the ordinary experiences of our lives.

The author of Hebrews asserts, God "has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you'" (Heb. 13:5). This study will confirm that God has, indeed, made and kept that very promise, again and again.

Begin the Workshop

Welcome participants to the PW/*Horizons* Bible study, *God's Promise: I Am with You*, the Bible study written by Presbyterian women for Presbyterian Women. Introduce yourself and encourage participants to meet one another as they gather.

Open by praying a psalm. God's "I will be with you" promise is very often accompanied by the reassurance, "I will never leave you or forsake you." Similarly, each lesson of the study begins with an excerpt from a psalm that reminds us that God does not forsake us.

To begin the workshop, invite participants to pray with you as you read from Psalm 139 (vv. 7–10), the psalm used in Lesson One (right).

Introductions

Invite participants to introduce themselves to the group.

Ask each person to share:

- Their name
- Who they plan to do this study with (Or, why they are participating in this workshop)



O God who draws near to us,
Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your
presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you
are there.
If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits
of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold
me fast.

- What comes to mind when they hear Hebrews 13:5, “[God] has said, ‘I will never leave you or forsake you’”? Where in scripture do they recall God saying that, or speaking the words “I am with you” or “I will be with you”?

Encourage participants to think broadly about times in the Bible that God’s presence was promised to or experienced by God’s people. This question is not intended to put them on the spot or force the recitation of specific biblical quotations, but rather to encourage them to reflect on the frequency of God’s promise of presence.

Introduce the *God’s Promise* authors and artists.

Biographies of the author, Amy Poling Sutherlun; the *Suggestions for Leaders* writer, Brenda Bertrand; and the artists, He Qi and Annette Cable, are on page 3 of the study book. Read these biographies to the group.

Introduce the Bible study. When tasked with writing a Bible study on God’s “I am with you” promise, Amy Sutherlun began by researching all the places and times in the Bible that God spoke that promise (and the future-tense version, “I will be with you”). She then narrowed her selection down to focus on 18 different scripture passages in which God speaks God’s promise to 10 individuals as well as to groups of people (for instance, the Israelites and Jesus’ disciples). As a result, this is not an exhaustive study of any particular book of the Bible, but, rather, a thematic journey that highlights the scope and recurrence of God’s most repeated promise. This journey will take us through the Old Testament stories and into the New Testament Gospel accounts.

Introduce the study book and resources. Ask participants to open their books to Lesson One on page 11. The focus and primary scriptures can be found at the beginning of each lesson, which is helpful since we will find ourselves studying

passages from multiple books of the Bible in each lesson.

Direct participants’ attention to the psalm that begins this and each lesson; the psalms remind us that God does not forsake us. The reading or praying of the psalms is intended to be a centering experience for groups and individuals as they start the lesson. (If leaders are going to use a Christ candle, they can light one after they read the psalm.)

Point out that, throughout the text of the study, there are fill-in-the-blank quotations. Some people really like this format when doing Bible study; others really do not. Amy has incorporated them as a method of encouraging readers to actively engage in Bible study by asking readers to open their own Bibles and look closely at the text, rather than just passively reading what she wrote about it. She has used the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible for the quotations, but participants may choose the translation they most enjoy. These fill-in-the-blank quotations are more than just rote copying. Participants may consider looking up the scriptures and filling in the blanks as a way of claiming the promises, of bringing them from the page of the Bible to their own page. Engaging in this process allows them to make their own discoveries about God’s word, which Amy and *PW/Horizons* hope participants will find meaningful.

There are also numerous open-ended discussion questions in each lesson to prompt deeper reflection and to encourage readers to make connections between the biblical story and their own lives and stories. Because God’s promise of presence is a personal promise, spoken not only then, but now, to us, as we study the biblical story, we will also be learning to tell our story, throughout which God is equally present. For this

God's Promise timeline

- Theme chosen: February 2014
- Author chosen: February 2015
- Field tested: Fall 2016
- Revised/rewritten/final draft: January–August 2017
- Published: March 2018

reason, some of the questions you and the participants encounter will be intentionally personal, for individual reflection and not, perhaps, for group discussion. Remind leaders participating in this workshop to allow participants to opt out of sharing if participants prefer. Now is a good time to pause and ask workshop participants to share strategies or suggestions for both inviting and guiding the sharing of personal stories during a group Bible study.

- *How do you encourage study participants to share personal reflections that connect the biblical story to their own life?* Ideas include: Modeling relevant personal sharing yourself; inviting participants to “pair-share,” turning to a person next to them to share an answer to a more personal question, with no pressure to report back to the whole group; asking participants whether anyone has a personal reflection to share from their advance study time, or something that has come to mind since. Giving verbal permission for reflections to remain private helps create an atmosphere in which participants know that it is safe for them to share when they are ready to do so.
- *How do you guide a discussion back on track when personal sharing gets too lengthy or strays from the topic?* Ideas include: Phrasing the initial question

so that it includes a limitation, “Does anyone have a one- or two-sentence summary of their own experience of this?”; utilizing the “pair-share” method mentioned above and specifying that participants have two minutes to share with the person next to them, then sticking to that by calling the group back together promptly; gently interrupting a lengthy story with appreciation, “I’m so grateful for your willingness to share your experience/story/insight and for the part we’ve gotten to hear, but I also want to be mindful of our time and wonder whether anyone else would like to share before we return to the next part of our study.”

As you make your way through *God's Promise*, you may notice that none of the biblical stories on which Amy focuses are stories in which the main character is a woman. This may seem strange since this is a study written by women for women. The reason is that, while she was not intentionally exclusionary, she was intentional in selecting passages where God or God’s agent actually spoke the promise “I am with you” or “I will be with you.” It turns out that, in the Bible, the promise is directly spoken to men (or to groups that include both men and women, such as the Israelite people), but is not specifically spoken to the women who are named and known in scripture. Of course, God’s promise of presence is nonetheless a promise made to women and fulfilled for women, both throughout biblical history and in the present. To highlight this point, “What About Her?” stories have been included in each lesson of the study.

The study book also includes these helpful resources:

- A poster you can use to advertise your study group meetings
- “About the Suggestions for Leaders” and the “Suggestions for Leaders.” (Read “About the

Suggestions for Leaders” before you use each lesson’s “Suggestions for Leaders” to help you prepare to lead the study.)

- “About the Art,” which includes information about James Qi He and his art
- The “Lesson Scope and Sequence” section, which provides an overview of the titles, focus statements, and primary scripture references for each lesson
- “Things to Look for in this Study”
- Finally, an annotated bibliography, which can be found at the end of the study. (Amy has included books that heavily informed both the *God’s Promise* study and her own thinking about God’s promise of presence. Some are very scholarly resources and others are more accessible and devotional in nature. Amy hopes they will be enjoyed by those looking for deeper and related study on the topic of God’s promise to be with us.)

Explore the *God’s Promise* Study

Small-group Bible study. This portion of the workshop will be a small-group Bible study through which participants will delve briefly into the passages used in the *God’s Promise* study, gaining an understanding of which stories will be addressed in the study and beginning to make connections between the biblical promise of God’s presence and God with us today.

Divide workshop participants into small groups of two or three. They will need: pen/pencil, Bibles, and copies of the two-sided handout accompanying this *Workshop for Leaders*.

On the first side of the handout, “Discovering the Promise,” there is a list of 15 scripture passages, nearly all of the key scripture passages in the *God’s Promise* study, listed according to the lesson in which they are found. Assign a scripture passage to

each small group. (If you have fewer than 15 groups, assign more than one passage to each group. You will want to have each passage assigned to someone in order to get a sense of the whole study and to complete the accompanying chart; participants can complete the unassigned passages on their own after the workshop, if they desire.)

Ask each group to look up their assigned passage in the Bible and read it either silently or aloud, as their group prefers. They should then answer the questions in the box, based on their assigned passage. If a group has been assigned more than one passage, they should answer the questions for each passage separately. (Photocopy and distribute handouts accordingly so that participants have somewhere to record their answers.)

- **Who?** To whom is God’s presence promised?
- **When/Where?** What is the context for the promise? (Not so much the date and geographical location, but the circumstances surrounding the speaking of the promise.)
- **What?** Write down the actual words of the promise. What does God, or God’s agent, say? In what verse is it found?
- **Why?** Why is it valuable that God’s promise is reiterated in these particular circumstances, or to this (these) particular person(s)? Why do we care? What meaning does it have for us?

Reporting. When the small groups have completed their study and responded to the four questions, they should prepare to report back to the whole workshop group. Ask them to give a brief summary of the *who*, *when*, *what*, and *why* for their assigned passages.

As other groups are reporting, instruct participants to fill in the “Mapping the Promise” chart, including in each box a brief note about to whom

and when the promise is spoken in each passage. Point out to participants that this same handout can be used in the Bible studies they lead. They can simply fill in the boxes as they move through the lessons. This diagonal chart maps God's promise from the beginning of the Old Testament (lower left corner) through the Gospels (upper right corner).

Reflection. After all groups have reported back, allow some time for the workshop participants to reflect.

- Did you discover anything that surprised you?
- Which stories are you looking forward to studying in more depth? Why?

Preparing Your Bibles

As an optional activity during the workshop (or a suggested activity at home), use Post-it® notes or other removable labels to mark the *God's Promise* study passages in your own Bible(s). Suggest that leaders use the list of 15 passages on the handout and label each passage by lesson number or biblical figure. This will allow you and the leaders to easily find the passages as you study them yourselves and

lead others in the study. It also provides a nice visual representation of the scope and frequency of God's promise of presence, from the beginning of the Bible to the end.

Closing the Workshop

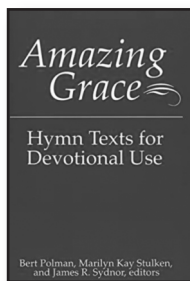
Close the workshop by reading or singing the hymn "How Firm a Foundation" (GtG 463, PH 361), especially verses 1, 2, and 5, printed here.

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in God's excellent Word!
What more can be said than to you God hath said,
to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

"Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
for I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee
to stand,
upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.

"The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
that soul, though all hell should endeavor
to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake."

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2018–2019 PW/*Horizons* Bible Study by Amy Poling Sutherlun

God's Promise: I Am with You

	Title	Focus	Primary Scripture
Intro		What is the study about? Includes the Introduction, About the Art, Things to Look for in this Study, and Lesson Scope and Sequence	
1	God with Us Wherever We Are	God's promise to be with us allows us to consider the surprising and powerful intimacy of God's willingness to be with us in all our circumstances.	Genesis 26:1–6; 28:10–22
2	God with Us in Our Uncertainty	God accompanies the called; it is God's presence in our weakness that equips us for our calling.	Exodus 3:1–12; Judges 6:11–27
3	God with Us in Our Discouragement	God's promise of presence gives us courage, strength, boldness, and hope, when on our own we would lose heart.	Deuteronomy 31:1–8; Joshua 1:1–9; Haggai 1:1–15, 2:1–9
4	God with Us When We Seek God	God summons God's people, and especially God's leaders, to walk in God's ways and to seek God.	1 Chronicles 28:1–21; 1 Kings 11:1–13, 29–39
5	God with Us When We're Powerless	God's promise of presence when we are powerless invites us to lay down our weapons of worry and keep our eyes on God.	2 Chronicles 20:1–30; Deuteronomy 20:1–4
6	God with Us Through Our Trials	God says, "I will be with you," and that promise of presence conveys the depth of God's love.	Isaiah 41:8–13; 43:1–7; Psalm 46:1–11
7	God with Us as Emmanuel	The promise shifts from the "God with us" promise to the "God with us" person of Jesus Christ.	Isaiah 7:10–16; Matthew 1:18–25
8	God with Us as the Holy Spirit	God who was incarnate in Jesus Christ is now present as the Holy Spirit.	John 14:1–31
9	God with Us	Jesus extends the promise of presence to his followers, whom he sends into the world.	Matthew 18:15–20; 28:16–20

1. Hymns marked (GtG) are from *Glory to God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2013).

2. Hymns marked (PH) are from *The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1990).

3. Chicago: Gia, 2001.

With Suggestions for Leaders by Brenda Bertrand

Lesson Summary Chart

Opening Psalm	Hymns GtG = <i>Glory to God</i> ¹ PH = <i>Presbyterian Hymnal</i> ²	Notes
Psalm 139:7-10	“Go, Tell It on the Mountain” (GtG 136); “I Love To Tell the Story” (GtG 462)	
Psalm 37:23-28	“Be Still, My Soul” (GtG 819); “The God of Abraham Praise” (GtG 49); “I, the Lord of Sea and Sky” (“Here I Am, Lord”) (GtG 69)	
Psalm 138:1-2, 7-8	“Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah” (GtG 65 and PH 281)	
Psalm 9:7-10	“Great Is Thy Faithfulness” (GtG 39); “Take My Life” (GtG 697); “Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy” (GtG 415); “How Firm a Foundation” (GtG 463 and PH 361)	
Psalm 27:7-9	“The Lord Is My Light” (GtG 842; <i>African American Heritage Hymnal</i> ³ 160); “God Is My Strong Salvation” (GtG 841)	
Psalm 71:5-9	“Precious Lord, Take My Hand” (GtG 834); “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah” (GtG 65); “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less” (GtG 353); “Loving Spirit” (GtG 293); “Nothing Can Trouble” (“ <i>Nada te Turbe</i> ”) (GtG 820)	
Psalm 38:15, 21-22	“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (GtG 88)	
Psalm 94:12-15	You may have already sung a hymn during the opening psalm. If time allows, sing, “Come Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove” (GtG 279)	
Psalm 71:17-19	“Lord, You Give the Great Commission” (GtG 298); “God Be with You Till We Meet Again” (GtG 541, 542)	

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The Promise:

Lesson One

1. Genesis 26:1–6
2. Genesis 28:10–22

Lesson Two

3. Exodus 3:1–12
4. Judges 6:11–27

Lesson Three

5. Joshua 1:1–9
6. Haggai 1:1–13, 2:1–5

Lesson Four

7. 1 Chronicles 28:1–10, 20–21

Lesson Five

8. Deuteronomy 20:1–4
9. 2 Chronicles 20:1–17

Lesson Six

10. Isaiah 41:8–13, 43:1–7
11. Psalm 46:1–11

Lesson Seven

12. Matthew 1:18–25

Lesson Eight

13. John 14:15–21

Lesson Nine

14. Matthew 18:15–20
15. Matthew 28:16–20

Discovering the Promise: Scripture passage:

Who? To whom is God's presence promised?

When/Where? What is the context for the promise? Not so much the date and geographical location, but the circumstances surrounding the speaking of the promise.

What? Write down the actual words of the promise. What does God, or God's agent, say? In what verse is it found?

Why? Why is it valuable that God's promise is reiterated in these particular circumstances, or to this particular person, or to these people? Why do we care? What meaning does it have for us?

Mapping the Promise

(15) Matthew 28:

(13) John 14:

(14) Matthew 18:

(12) Matthew 1:

(10) Isaiah 41 and 43:

(6) Haggai 1 and 2:

(7) 1 Chronicles 28:

(11) Psalm 46:

(9) 2 Chronicles 20:

(3) Exodus 3:

(4) Judges 6:

(5) Joshua 1:

(8) Deuteronomy 20:

(2) Genesis 28:

(1) Genesis 26:

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by Amy Poling Sutherland

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