

ROMANS

THE CHRISTIAN'S CONSTITUTION

STUDY ELEVEN

The Man Who Hoped Against Hope

Romans 4:16–25

God made a promise to His friend Abraham: “I will give you a son.” To believe God’s promise, Abraham needed to set aside human logic, human opinion, the age of his wife, and his own age. He trusted God to keep His word.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

SOMETIMES we wonder if a promise made will be a promise kept.

When customer service representatives put us on hold, we get cranky fretting that they won't come back on the line. We begin to doubt when friends promise to help us, but days slip by without hearing from them. Anxiety swells up when job interviewers smile at us and say that they will follow up . . . but will they?

The longer we wait, the more we wonder whether we can count on anyone to keep a promise. Are promises just scribbles in sand, easily washed away by tides of time and neglect?

In Romans 3, Paul delivered the good news of God's promise to give us eternal life by grace through faith. “We are made right with God through *faith*,” Paul declared (Romans 3:28, emphasis added). To illustrate the firmness of the promise and the reliability of the Giver, in Romans 4, Paul leads us into God's waiting room to meet Abraham.

Abraham never gave up believing God to give him and his wife a son, hoping against hope in what seemed an impossible dream. Abraham's faith teaches us to always count on God. *A promise made by God WILL BE a promise kept.*



The Man Who Hoped Against Hope

Romans 4:16–25



PREPARE YOUR HEART

“Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise” (Hebrews 10:23). Write a prayer expressing your faith in God to change your life with the eternal truths in His Word through this study.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Abraham’s given name was Abram, which means “exalted father.” When the Lord called the 75-year-old Abram from Haran, He promised to make Abram and his descendants a great nation ([Genesis 12:1–9](#)). Ten years later, the “exalted father” still had no children. So God reiterated His promise: “You will have a son of your own who will be your heir” (15:4).

Confident that God would keep His promise but not clear on how He would do it, Abram and Sarai used Hagar, Sarai’s maid, as a surrogate mother. Hagar bore Ishmael, but he was *not the fulfillment of God’s promise!*

More years passed and no heir. God appeared again to Abram. He confirmed to Abram that he would become “the father of many nations” and Sarai would be “the mother of many nations” (17:5, 16). To seal the promise, God changed Abram’s name to Abraham—meaning, “father of a multitude,” and Sarai’s name to Sarah—meaning “princess.”

The 99-year-old man laughed at the thought of having a baby at his age (17:17). Sarah laughed when she got wind of the news (18:12), wondering to herself, “Can an old woman like me have a baby?” Perhaps the Lord laughed too when He replied with a smile, “Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return about this time next year, and Sarah will have a son” (17:13–14).

What happened a year later, and what did Sarah say in [21:1–7](#)? Put yourself in her place—what were her emotions after God kept His promise?

The Man Who Hoped Against Hope

Romans 4:16–25



Observation: Abraham Hoped Against Hope

Take the first step of the *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, observation, by reading [Romans 4:16–25](#).¹ Note the expression “for this reason” (NASB) that connects this section to the previous one. Record your initial observations.

In [Romans 4:16–17](#), what is the “it” referring to in the phrase, “For this reason it is by faith” (NASB)? Why must it be by faith (see [4:1–5](#))? How did Paul describe the God whom Abraham believed in [4:17](#)?

To uphold the grace message from God, the only thing we have to offer is our faith. The “it,” from “in order that it may be in accordance with grace.” That’s justification. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Faith that keeps hoping through long periods of time fixes its gaze on God and His power. How did Paul illustrate Abraham’s kind of patient faith in [4:18](#)?

Read [4:19–21](#) a few times. What facts did Abraham contemplate concerning his body and Sarah’s womb? How did he respond? What undeniable truth strengthened his faith?

The Man Who Hoped Against Hope

Romans 4:16–25

How did Paul apply the example of Abraham to the Roman believers in [Romans 4:22–25](#)?

It was nothing for the God who created life from the dust of the earth to breathe life into Sarah's womb. That's the same power that raised Jesus from the dead! Let's deepen our understanding of hoping against hope in our God who does the impossible.



Interpretation: Hoping Against Hope

Paul illustrated his assertion that “a person is justified by faith apart from works of the Law” (Romans 3:28 NASB) by pointing to Abraham's faith. The old patriarch “hoped against hope,” Paul wrote. (4:18 NASB). Read [Romans 4:18](#) in the NET and J. B. Phillips translations. Write this expression in simple terms anyone can understand and then explain its significance.

“In hope against hope.” What does that mean? Any hope of his wife ever conceiving. Any hope of his being able to enable that to happen. There was a period of time of waiting between when God told him he was going to be a father of many nations, and when he actually had the child. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

In [4:19–21](#), we saw that Abraham did not waver in unbelief but “grew strong in faith” (NASB), praising God. Look up the Greek verbs *diakrino*, “waver,” and *endynamoo*, “grew strong,” in the Greek lexicon available for free at billmounce.com or consult the commentary of your choice. Rewrite these three verses in your own words and expand on their significance for your walk with Christ today.

The Man Who Hoped Against Hope

Romans 4:16–25

I love that word waver. It's the word, "to be divided in one's mind." Abraham wasn't divided. As a matter of fact, we read, "he grew strong in faith." The word means "to empower." His trust in God was empowered over the passing of time.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

In [Romans 4:22–25](#), Paul applied Abraham's example to his Roman readers. Just as God counted Abraham righteous by faith, He will also count as righteous anyone who has "faith like Abraham's" (4:16). Record a principle or two from this passage that is important for you to remember about God or practical for you to apply in your walk with Him.

God sovereignly declares us righteous when we come to the cross and acknowledge that Jesus Christ paid the complete penalty for our sins. And there's nothing that needs to be done or paid or earned. Nothing. It's called His finished work. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: God's Promises, Faith, and Facts

Throughout Scripture, God has a perfect track record of keeping His promises. When He promises to do something impossible, we see people like Abraham weighing the facts—his and Sarah's old age—against the power of God. They must choose whether to fix their eyes on the obstacles or on God, and then they must decide whether or not to trust Him to keep His promise.

Take time to interview Moses and the Israelites who walked across the Red Sea on dry ground ([Exodus 14](#)), the barren women who held their babies in their hands ([Genesis 25:21; 30:22–24; 1 Samuel 1:1–20](#)), or Noah and his family who believed God and entered the ark ([Genesis 6:9–20; 7:1–10](#)). What themes emerge from these stories about God's promises, faith, and facts?

The Man Who Hoped Against Hope

Romans 4:16–25

Think about God's ability to do what He promised. Compare [John 10:24–30](#); [Romans 4:16–25](#); [8:31–39](#). Specify the significance of these passages to the promise of eternal life by grace through faith.

What if I place my trust and faith in Jesus? I know that I'm far from perfection, but will God hold me? Will God keep me? How big is your God? If it were you or me, we would give up. But Jesus says, "You're Mine, My sheep hear My voice, I know them and they follow Me and I give to them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone pluck them out of My Father's hand. My Father and I are one. I put My name on the line, trust Me."

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Compare [Numbers 23:19](#); [Psalm 9:10](#); [Isaiah 26:4](#); [40:27–31](#); and [Romans 4:16–21](#). What strengthens our faith as we wait on Him? Why is faith not blind?

God is not unrighteous to forget what He's promised. Waiting strengthens our faith, and faith is based on knowledge. It's not a blind faith. It's not a faith that denies facts. But it's a faith that sees God as greater than the facts.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Believe in the God Who Keeps His Promises!

Our last step, application, challenges us to allow the Holy Spirit to transform our lives with the timeless principles we just learned. What has the Holy Spirit highlighted during this Bible study that strengthened your faith?

The Man Who Hoped Against Hope

Romans 4:16–25

Knowing that God is able to do all He promised, why not leave anything troubling you at His feet? Hand it over to Him in prayer and thank Him for sustaining you.

You may be wavering over something that has just continued to nag at you, and you've heard enough today to know that God is able. Leave it with Him. Release it. "Cast your burden on the Lord and He will sustain you." Leave it there. Trust Him. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for who You are, trustworthy, faithful, and true. May I believe that You are who You say You are. Thank You for Your Word. May I believe in it. May I stand on it. May I be fully convinced that You have the power to do what You promised. With You, a promise made will always be a promise kept. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2007, 2025 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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Study 11 • Page 7

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