

# Week Two: Romans 4:18–25

## Key Verses

“He did not waver in unbelief at God’s promise but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, because he was fully convinced that what God had promised, he was also able to do.” - Romans 4:20–21 (CSB)

## Key Principles

- True faith is about trusting a Person (God), not mere propositions.
- A promise is more or less meaningful depending on who is giving it.
- Faith stands on God’s past faithfulness and hopes in him for future faithful-ness to his promises.
- Faith trusts the firm foundation of God’s excellent Word, even when reasons to doubt God abound.
- When we trust God, he is glorified as the powerful Promise-keeper.

## Read

We're told in Romans that Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness (4:3). But what exactly did it look like for Abraham to believe God? Romans 4:18–25 gives us a fuller picture of what God promised Abraham and also what he promises us!

God had promised Abraham descendants. Abraham was over a hundred years old, and still he and his wife, Sarah, had no children. Abraham's body was as good as dead, and so was his wife's womb (4:19). As he considered his own resources to bring about the promise, things looked hopeless. If it was going to happen, it would have to be an act of God. Still, Abraham trusted God, believing that "what God had promised, he was also able to do" (4:21). Through Abraham's story from Genesis, Paul teaches some very important truths about the nature biblical faith.

Romans 4:18–25 shows us the object of faith—God. All throughout Romans 4, we see that "Abraham believed God" (4:3, emphasis added), and that God is presented as the supreme object of our faith. True faith is about trusting a Person (God), not mere propositions. We don't just believe that God justifies the ungodly, we believe "on him" (4:5). God is that Person "in whom Abraham believed" (4:17, emphasis added). And Genesis was not written for Abraham alone, but also for us (4:23–24). A promise is more or less meaningful depending on who is giving it. But we can trust the promises of God because God has continually shown himself to be faithful. We place our trust in the God behind the promise, not the promise itself! As 1 Peter 1:21 says, our "faith and hope are *in God*" (emphasis added).

Romans 4:18–25 also reveals that true faith rests on God’s Word, not on the tangible evidence of our earthly senses, like sight or touch. Abraham had zero tangible evidence that God’s promise would come true. In fact, everything pointed to the impossibility of him and Sarah having children, as Genesis and Romans affirm. The promise was so incredible that it made Sarah laugh when she heard it (Genesis 18:1–15). Yet Abraham “believed, hoping against hope ... according to what *had been spoken*” (Romans 4:18, emphasis added). Abraham trusted and believed God more than he trusted his circumstances. “He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body ... and also the deadness of Sarah’s womb. He did not waver in unbelief at *God’s promise* but was strengthened in faith” (Romans 4:19–20, emphasis added). Faith trusts the firm foundation of God’s excellent Word, even when reasons to doubt God abound.

Romans 4:18–25 demonstrates that faith brings glory to God. We know that God created all things for his glory, and so, everything we do is to be done for the glory of God. “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). The reason why God’s wrath is against everyone is because everyone has failed to glorify him (Romans 1:21). That is what Romans 3:23 means when it says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” But in Romans 4:20, we read that Abraham “gave glory to God.” How exactly can Abraham, an unrighteous man, glorify God?

Abraham glorified God by trusting him. This trust in God is the essence of faith. In a literal translation of Romans 4:20, Abraham “was strengthened in his faith, giving glory to God.” Note that “giving glory” here is a participle, meaning that God is being glorified through the very act of Abraham’s faith. And the next part of the verse clarifies what Paul means. Romans 4:21 says, “- giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, he was able also to perform” (NASB). When we trust God, we glorify him because we are making a statement about God in our hearts. We are saying, “I am fully assured that what God has promised, he is able to perform.” On the contrary, unbelief dishonors God. Unbelief says, “God is neither faithful, nor willing, to come through on his promise.” And so, when we trust him, God is glorified as the powerful Promise-keeper. Martin Luther put it this way, “[Faith] honors him whom it trusts with the most reverent and highest regard, since it considers him truthful and trustworthy.”<sup>1</sup>

One further point about faith from Romans 4:18–25: Faith isn’t merely trusting in what God has done, it also hopes in what God will do in the future. Faith is trusting a Person (God) to be and do what he has promised to do. As Romans 4:18 says, Abraham “believed, hoping against hope” (CSB). Meaning, Abraham persevered in hope, even when there was no human reason for hope. Hope and faith intersect throughout the Bible. Hebrews 11:1 tells us that, “faith is the assurance of things hoped for” (ESV, emphasis added). Romans 8:24–25 says it this way, “hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? Now if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience” (CSB). As a demonstration of his faith in God, Abraham hoped in what he did not see, trusting God with the future.

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1 Martin Luther, "Freedom of a Christian (1520)," in *American Edition of Luther's Works*, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957–1986), 31:147.

Oftentimes, we think that becoming a Christian is only about affirming past historical events— that Christ came, died for our sins, and rose again. And while believing those truths is important, it is not the full picture of biblical faith. God's past faithfulness is grounds for trusting him for the future. Notice in the verses that follow, the past grounds our faith in God so that we trust him for the future. Romans 5:9 says, "How much more then, since we have now been declared righteous by his blood [past], will we be saved through him from wrath [future]." Again in Romans 8:32: "He did not even spare his own Son but offered him up for us all [past]. How will he not also with him grant us everything [future]?" Faith looks back on the demonstration of God's love for us in Christ's death, and then trusts God to fulfill all his promises in the future.

Romans 4 teaches that God justifies the ungodly by faith, not by works. Faith glorifies God by taking him at his Word above all other realities. Faith takes a stand on God's past faithfulness and hopes in him for future faithfulness to his promises. Romans scholar, Thomas Schreiner, aptly summarizes the teaching of Romans 4, saying:

The faith that results in righteousness is not a vague abstraction. Genuine faith adheres to God's promise despite the whirlwind of external circumstances that imperil it. Most important, faith receives its nourishment by anchoring on the God who made the promises. He can

and will fulfill his pledges because he is the resurrecting God who creates life out of death, and because he is the sovereign God who summons into existence that which does not even exist.<sup>2</sup>

And so, this week, it is our hope that, through reading and wrestling with Romans 4, our faith will be nourished and anchored in the unchanging character and faithfulness of our righteous God.

### **Study Guide**

The following study questions are meant to help us wrestle with the text of Romans. Set aside some time this week to meet with God and answer these questions for yourself.

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 239.

Complete each question before your weekly small group meeting. Then, when you gather with your small group, be prepared to discuss your answers together.



**Read Romans 1:16–17 to remain focused on Paul’s major points. Then, read Romans 4:18– 25 in preparation for this week’s study.**

## Highlight

1. Highlight the times Paul quotes the Old Testament in Romans 4:18–25.
2. What are the words Paul uses to describe the impossibility of Abraham and Sarah having children? What words does Paul use to highlight Abraham's faith?
3. Highlight all the times a variation of the word faith or belief is used in Romans 4:18–25.



4. Go through and circle the times Paul uses these connector words: “so that,” “therefore,” and “because.”

## Explain

5. Why does Paul quote the Old Testament in Romans 4:18–25?

6. What specifically did Abraham believe about God in 4:21 and why is this significant?

7. How would you define unbelief from Romans 4:21–22? And why does unbelief dishonor God?

8. According to the "therefore" in Romans 4:22, why was faith credited to Abraham as righteousness?

## Apply

9. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you identify any areas of unbelief in your life. Confess this unbelief to people close to you. What are some steps you can take to repent of your unbelief and to walk in faith?

10. Have you seen people around you who glorify God by trusting his promises, even in impossible situations? What are some ways you can encourage someone going through such circumstances right now?

11. What are you trusting God for right now? Which of his promises do you want him to come through on this year? Write down the Scripture(s) where you find those promises. Share them with your group.

12. How does the gospel give you words to encourage your One, particularly when he or she is going through difficult circumstances?

# Respond in Prayer

Each week of this study guide will include a recommended Scripture passage that helps us focus on the faithfulness of our great God. Set aside some time this week to read through the selected passage and use the prayer prompts below as your guide. We recommend praying through this passage on your own at home and together with your small group.

## **This Week's Prayer Passage: Romans 4:18–25**

Read Romans 4:18–25.

Pray through the following prompts, according to the A.C.T.S. method.

- **Adoration:** Praise God that he makes promises to sinners. Praise him that he is faithful and powerful enough to keep every promise he has ever made (4:21).
- **Confession:** How have you wavered “in unbelief at God’s promise” (4:20)? Go to the Lord and confess your unbelief in him. Confess to him the ways you have dishonored him in not trusting his Word.
- **Thanksgiving:** Thank God for the firm foundation of his Word. Praise God for Christ, who went to the uttermost to confirm God’s promises (15:8). Thank God for delivering up Jesus for our trespasses (4:24) and raising him from the dead.
- **Supplication:** What are some promises from Scripture you want God

to fulfill? Ask him for them. As Charles Spurgeon famously described, plead God's own handwriting before him.<sup>3</sup> Go to God earnestly, hoping against hope, believing that what he has promised, he is surely able to perform (4:21).

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<sup>3</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, "Pleading Prayer," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 33 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1887), 352–353