

The God of Hope
The Promise of Hope
Romans 4:18-21

It seems that Todd Gordon was sitting by himself in a movie theater waiting for the film to start. And he leaned over to the large woman who happened to be sitting next to him and asked, "Would you like to hear a funny West Virginia hillbilly joke?"

The woman replied, "Well, before you tell it, you should know something. I'm from West Virginia, and I'm six feet tall, 210 lbs, and I'm a professional tri-athlete and bodybuilder. The woman sitting next to me is from West Virginia, and she is 6'2", weighs 220 lbs, and she is an ex-professional wrestler. Next to her is another man from West Virginia who's 6'5", weighs 280 lbs, and he's a current professional wrestler and kick boxer. Now, do you still want to tell that West Virginia joke?"

Todd thought about it a few seconds and said, "No, I guess not--the movie is going to start in a few minutes, and I wouldn't have time to explain it three times."

True story!!! How many of you like professional wrestling? It's ok, God won't hold it against, I might, but God won't! How many of you like professional wrestling? Well, have you ever noticed some of the names those people give themselves? Names like; Carnage; The Rock; The Undertaker; and Cain. That tells you how long it has been since I watch pro wrestling. One day I was flipping channels and it was on and I just happen to catch the name of the guy wrestling. Get this; his name was, "The Bone Crusher." Now there's a name for you, "The bone crusher". It made me shutter just thinking about it. But then I realized that I know people who are facing some things in life that would make a professional wrestler cringe and run in fear. Whether it is physical, emotional, relational, financial, or spiritual; some people are facing hard times right now.

What do you do when life is crushing your bones? We've all had those moments, or we will have those moments, because life always has those moments. But what do you do? Well, that is the question that I took to God this week. And as I prayed, I sensed the Lord redirecting my plans for our lessons over the next few weeks. I sensed the Lord directing me to help us as a family of faith to discover what to do when faced with the bone crushing realities of life. What to do when we feel like the people in the biblical book of Ezekiel who cried out, *"Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone."* (Eze 37:11) What do you do? Well, I believe what you need to do is to discover The God of Hope, AMEN! The God of the bible; the God of the Christian faith is the God of Hope. And so for the next few weeks, we are going to look at what the bible says about that hope; what the bible says about the purpose of that hope, and the process of developing that hope, and the challenge of the church to be a people of hope. With that being said I want you to take your Bibles and turn to the book of **Romans 4:18-21...Prayer**

I feel that today we need to allow this piece of Scripture be our guide to look at the **Promise of Hope**. If we are going to discover the God of hope in the face of those bone crushing realities of life, then we need to begin by discovering the promise of hope from the God of all hope. In that same book Paul writes, *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."* (Ro 15:13) But let me tell you something: You will not know that joy and peace and power until you discover that promise of Hope from the God of all hope. Let me share with you a couple of things I have learned about the promise of hope.

1) The first has to do with the real **meaning** of hope.

What is this hope that can rescue us from the bone crushing realities of life? Well, listen to what the Bible has to say about a man who discovered that kind of hope. *"Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be."* (Ro 4:18) Abraham is one of the first main characters we come to in the bible. He was married to a woman named Sarah, and together they faced one of those bone crushing lives. Let me tell you about their lives; **they were uprooted**; they had to leave their home and family; They spent most of their lives wandering around a foreign land; always strangers without a place to call home. **They were disappointed**, because they had always wanted a family. God had promised them a family, but month followed month and year followed year and decade followed decade and still there were no children. Now please understand that I say this with the utmost respect, but **they were also arthritic**. Abraham was a hundred, and his wife was so old that they had discontinued her blood type! Do you get the picture? They were uprooted, disappointed, arthritic. And still, against all hope, Abraham in hope believed. (Ro 4:18)

What did Abraham believe? Simply this: That with God, things always work out. That's what he believed. He believed that with God, the best is always yet to come, because with God, things always work out. That's the essence of hope: It is the confidence that with God - no matter what the circumstances of my life - things are going to work out. Abraham believed that. Can you? The promise of hope that runs from cover to cover in the bible is that with God things are going to work out.

For example, Jer. 29:11 says, *"I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* (Je 29:11) There is the promise of hope. With God, things always work out. Romans 8:28 says, *"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."* (Ro 8:28) There it is again, the promise of hope that with God things always work out. It is the constant thread that runs throughout scripture. That's what Abraham believed and that's what Abraham discovered. The bible says, *"Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God."* (Ro 4:19-20) I have discovered that **hope accepts the faithfulness of God over the apparent facts of life.** Abraham didn't ignore the facts. The bible says here that he faced the facts. His arthritis and Sarah's wrinkles wouldn't let him ignore the facts, but the difference was that Abraham was convinced that God is the Lord of the facts. He understood that **the facts of life do not determine the will of God; instead, the will of God determines the facts of life.** The facts of life do not determine the will of God - The will of God determines the facts of life. God is the Lord of the facts of life, and he has said that no matter what the facts may appear to be; those facts are subject to his will; and he has promised that He will work things out for you no matter what your facts might be in life. Can you believe that? Abraham did - in spite of everything, Abraham believed. Can you? *I guess I shouldn't have been surprised when I heard about it. But the church, which was located on the East Coast, was faced with a crisis. Sometimes the church itself must face bone crushing realities. And this church was facing just such a time.*

So they called a church wide meeting and one of the board members opened the meeting with prayer. This is what he prayed: "Oh mighty and eternal God. Your grace is sufficient for all that we do."

He then finished his prayer and began the meeting with these words: "Friends, the situation facing us is hopeless; there is nothing we can do."

Family that is sad, either he prayed a meaningless prayer; or his analysis of the church's situation was untrue. Because the promise of the God of hope is that with Him, things always work out. There are no hopeless situations, only people who have become hopeless about their situation. The central essence of hope, according to scripture, is that with God things always work out. But how can we believe that? Is that just an empty statement or is there some basis for that belief?

2) Well, that's the next thing I learned about the promise of hope that I want you catch this morning. It's what I call, the important **root** of hope.

There is a root for the hope that believes that with God things always work out. Now listen in again to this biblical description of Abraham and let me show it to you. It says, *"He did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised."* (Ro 4:20-21) What was Abraham's root for his hope? What was Abraham's basis for believing that with God things were going to work out? Well, I'll tell you one thing: **It's wasn't his circumstances.** There was nothing in his circumstances that enabled him to believe that things were going to work out. I mean, he was childless and he had a wife who was so far past her child-bearing years that when people asked her how she felt, she would say, "I feel just like a new-born baby. No hair, no teeth, and if I laughed too hard I wet myself!" It definitely wasn't Abraham's circumstances that gave him a reason to believe that things were going to work out, and neither will yours. **And it wasn't Abraham's abilities** that formed the root for his hope. I mean, he was a hundred years old. His body was as good as dead. What didn't hurt, didn't work, and he had stopped buying natural foods because he needed all the preservatives he could get. It definitely wasn't his abilities that gave him a reason to believe that things were going to work out.

So what was it? What was his basis of hope? It says, he was *"fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised."* (Ro 4:21) The basis of his hope was simply this: **God keeps his promises!** The reason we can always have hope is because the God of hope always keeps His promises, and he has promised that all things will work together for good to them that love him. That's not just pie in the sky, ignore reality kind of thinking. That's hope in the God of hope who always keeps his promises. With that being said let me share with you three of the promises of God that make him the God of all hope.

a) Here is the first: I can hope because God always **watches**. No matter what the circumstances of my life; no matter what my abilities or inabilities; no matter what mountain top I'm on or what dark alley I find myself in; God is always watching over me. The Bible says, *"O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my every thought when far away. You chart the path ahead of me and tell me where to stop and rest. Every moment you know where I am."* (Ps 139:1-3) What's that mean? That means that God has promised that he is always watching over you. He never takes his eyes off of you. He never gets distracted. He is always watching. *I can remember when Christy Dad told me about the joy he had in our girls. He told me that when they would come over for a visit, everything else goes right out the window. There's no watching basketball on TV, no reading a book, no working on the yard.*

He said, they are the Queen Bee from the moment they buzz through the front door. But he would tell the most enjoyable time is when only one of them are there. He then can give them his full attention.

He told about one time when one of them were there and Nora, who was cleaning up the dishes said, "Just keep an eye on her for a few moments, would you?"

Would he ever! He jumped into high gear and followed that little girl as she toddled into the bedroom, gave the place a once over and walked out again. He followed her as she gave the office. He scurried along as she headed for the living room. He said, "I don't think she realized that I was hovering over her, watching her every step."

He said, "Someone once accused me of following her around so that she wouldn't break one of my family treasures. I told them, 'SHE is the family treasure.'" As a grandpa, he didn't care if she broke everything in the joint!

He said that the reason he was watching over her was to protect her not the furnishings. She might fall down the stairs or tumble and bump her head or poke her eye out with something like chair cushion!

He said that he was watching over her to protect her and enjoy her. She was having a blast and so was he. He said watching over her was a privilege like no other. He never got tired of it.

Don't you think God treats you and me the same way? God always watches over you. He loves to watch over you. Not to catch in some mistake or breaking something, but to keep an eye on you because he really cares about you. The reason I can hope no matter what the bone crushing realities of my life is because God always watches over me, but that's not all.

b) Not only does God always watch, but God always **works**. The bible says, *"My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip— he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep."* (Ps 121:2-4) What does that mean? It means that God is always at work in your life. You don't have to wake him up to get him to do something. He is always at work. *Those of you who have kids, do you remember they were young and they learned how to crawl out of their beds and come get you? Sarah was one of those who would call out before she even got to our bedroom. "Mom!" "Dad!!!" And boom, we'd be up and going.*

Or at least Christy would be up and going and I would still be sleeping. Ok, that's not true. I would still be comatose!

But when Sarah would come calling in the middle of the night because she was hurt or scared or whatever, we would drag ourselves out of bed and go to help.

Emily on the other hand, preferred what I call the stalker approach. When she was smaller and learned how to crawl out of her bed, she would come into our bedroom, and waddle up beside the bed and just stare at us. Have you awoken because you just knew someone was staring at you?

Many times, that uneasy feeling would cause me to open my eyes only to have Emily staring at me just inches from my face.

But here is the point: You don't ever have to wake God up to get him to do something for you. He never slumbers or sleeps. He is always working. Behind the scenes, in the dark when no one else is awake; in the storms and in the battles when no one else is around; in the struggles and in the strains when no one else has a clue; God is always at work. That's why I can hope no matter what the bone crushing realities of my life, because God always watches over me; and God always is at work for me. But that's not all.

c) I can also have hope not only because God always **wins**. Go back to Abraham and what we read about him in the book of Romans. *"He did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised."* (Ro 4:20-21) Abraham was getting old, but God's promise wasn't! And that promise was that God always works things out: no matter what my circumstances; no matter what my abilities or inabilities; no matter what my obstacles or enemies; no matter what I'm up against, God always works things out because God always wins! *When I was in school I liked to play Basketball. I was pretty good too. Now, don't ask me go out in the gym here and prove it. Because unlike some other people I know, I know when to get off the court - and stay off!*

But I had a very successful basketball career, because I always won at basketball when I played. Of course, I'm sure that had nothing to do with the fact that whenever I played basketball I made sure I was on David Lillie's team.

You see, David was the son of a close family friend, and David was 6'9" and had a jump shot that never missed. And so I spent my basketball career on David's team.

And I want you to know that we could beat anybody, even North Carolina. You don't believe that? Well, we certainly could have beat Penn State. Booya!

All I know is that I made sure that I was on David's team, because David always won! And that's why I had a very successful basketball career.

David may have always won - but only at basketball. You can be sure of this, however: God will always win at everything! That is the root of our hope. That's the reason we can go on no matter what bone crushing realities we face.

3) Well, there is one more thing I have learned about the promise of hope that I want you to get a grip on today. Please believe not only in the real meaning of hope and the important root of hope, but also in the great **reward** of hope.

There is a reward for those who live by hope in God. Vs. 18 says, *“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”* (Ro 4:18) The reward of hope is a blessing from God. As sure and as certain as the sun rising tomorrow; there is a blessing from God for those who live by hope. Abraham experienced that blessing, and so he became the father of many nations. That family; was his reward. Older than dirt and married to a woman who could only remember what she did yesterday by what hurt today; Abraham received the blessing of a son named Isaac. And through that son and his descendents came Jesus who brought the blessing of forgiveness too all of us. **The reward of hope is a blessing from God.** Abraham experienced that blessing in the form of a son. *“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations.”* (Rom 4:18)

The certain reward for those who live by faith is that God will bless you. But please hear me clearly: **that blessing may not come when you want it.** Trust me, Abraham didn't want to wait until he was living off of milk of magnesium to experience his blessing from God, but that's what he had to do. The blessing that hope will bring you may not happen when you want it. And **that blessing may not happen the way you want it.** Abraham learned that too. When Abraham died, all that he had experience of this being a father of "many nations" was one kid named Isaac. That wasn't the way Abraham wanted it to be, and the blessing that God has for you, when you live by hope, may not come when you want it or the way you want it. But rest assured - have hope: **IT WILL COME!** God keeps his promises. He's the God of hope, and one thing that he has promised is that with him, things always work out. It may not work out when you want. It may not work out the way you want. But it will work out! *His name was Edwin. When he died, he left instructions that a particular letter be left in his pocket. Because that letter was his evidence of the hope that God gives us.*

Edwin had been an actor in his life. A renowned actor actually who amazed audiences both in the United States as well as England during the mid 19th century. His career came to halting crash when a fatal shooting took place in the theatre where he was performing in April of 1865.

That shooting ended Edwin's career not because he was the one who was shot. In fact, the person who was shot was President Abraham Lincoln. The reason that shooting ended Edwin's career was because the shooter was Edwin's brother. John Wilkes Booth's assassination of President Lincoln was such a stigma that it drove Edwin Booth into seclusion and retirement. He felt like his family and his life would forever be tainted by his brother's despicable deed.

But remember, God is a God of hope. And his promise of hope is that he will work things out for those who hope in him.

One evening in New Jersey, Edwin found himself waiting for the train. He was standing at the station near a young man who lost his footing just when the crowd started pressing toward the train.

The young man fell to the tracks below just the train jolted forward. Without a hint of hesitation, Edwin rescued the young man by wrapping his own leg around a railing and reaching down to pull him up by the collar. There was a brief exchange of words of gratitude, but Edwin never dreamed of how significant that moment would be.

You see, a few weeks later, Edwin received a letter from President Ulysses Grant's chief secretary. The letter was an expression of thanks for Edwin's heroic deed because the life that Edwin had saved was none other than Robert Todd Lincoln - President Lincoln's son.

Edwin took that letter to his grave. Because it reminded him that with God things always work out. The stigma removed. The blessing discovered.

When you place your hope in God of hope, things always work out. Maybe not the way you want; and not when you want, but they always work out.

Prayer: What bone crushing reality do you need to come and put into the hands of the God of hope so that you can leave here today with the confidence that God is going to work things out?

The God of Hope
The Promise of Hope
Romans 4:18-21

The Bone Crusher!
"Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone." (Eze 37:11)

The God of Hope
The Promise of Hope
"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Ro 15:13)

Three Powerful Discoveries About The Promise Of Hope:

#1: The Central Essence of Hope.

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, (Ro 4:18-20)

[screen: Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." (Ro 4:18)]

I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Je 29:11)

We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Ro 8:28)

Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God. (Ro 4:19-20)

Key Principle: The facts of life do not determine the will of God - The will of God determines the facts of life.

#2: The Critical Basis of Hope.

He did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. (Ro 4:20-21)

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Key: The reason we can always have hope is because God always keeps His promises.

Three Promises of the God of Hope:

1) God always watches.

O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my every thought when far away. You chart the path ahead of me and tell me where to stop and rest. Every moment you know where I am. (Ps 139:1-3)

2) God always works.

My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip— he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. (Ps 121:2-4)

3) God always wins.

He did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. (Ro 4:20-21)

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#3: The Certain Reward of Hope.

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Key: The reward of hope is a blessing from God.

Will You Choose Hope Today?

Call To Worship

What mighty praise, O God, belongs to you in Zion.

We will fulfill our vows to you, for you answer our prayers, and to you all people will come.

Though our hearts are filled with sins, you forgive them all.

What joy for those you choose to bring near, those who live in your holy courts.

What joys await us inside your holy Temple.

You faithfully answer our prayers with awesome deeds, O God our savior.

You are the hope of everyone on earth. (Ps 65:1-5)