

WHAT ARE GOD'S PROMISES?

DOT DOT DOT | Week 5 | 7.21.2019

Maybe this describes you—you're anxious about everything. And sometimes you're anxious about stuff and you have no idea what you're anxious about. Maybe yours is different. Maybe you're fearful about stuff and watching the news just amps you up in fear and overwhelms you. It doesn't matter if it's a natural disaster or a government issue or war somewhere far, far away, the fear just builds within you.



Maybe you feel like everyone hates you, no one likes you, and everyone's against you, and everyone's plotting against you, and whenever you see people you're just wondering what they're up to and why they're doing what they're doing. Maybe for you yours is a little different; you're lonely, never mind that you have 4,000 friends on social, you're still, you're deeply lonely and it's incredibly painful.

Some of you, you're paralyzed thinking something terrible is about to happen. It's just like this dark cloud is always over your head and you just know *Today's the day that that's gonna come down on me*. Maybe for you, you're making more money than you've ever made in your life and you're never been so scared. It's just, it's hard to wrap your brains around but that's where you're at. And for some of you, you'll wake up tomorrow morning like you do every morning fearful that this is gonna be the day you're gonna lose your job. And there's no reason to feel that way, but that's your reality.

I probably could go on with scenarios and whatever your scenario is here's what I would like you to know. I have something to share with you today from the Word of God that I am confident that can overcome these things. And I know you've been working on them for a lot of years, just tried a whole lot of things, I am convinced what I am about to share with you will overcome them.

Now, psychologists will tell you that we have these neural pathways that were created probably when we were real young in some catastrophic moment—when your parents got divorced, or when your first girlfriend broke up with you, or when that kid beat you up on the playground, or when you went to college and failed that first course and they kicked you out—whatever it was that put you into these modes of thinking and created this kind of a mindset. And those same psychologists will tell you that those things that created this mindset that you're struggling with right here, right now today, those very things the older you get the deeper those neurological ruts get in your brain. And so it's really much, much harder to get out of them and it's harder for them to bring you out of those ruts the older you get. Again, I believe I have something to share with you today that's going to put all of that into perspective and help you get out of that rut.



We are in a series called DOT DOT DOT and the reason why we say dot dot dot is today we're not worried about what comes before it or what comes after it. We've been in the book of Romans since the beginning of the year but at the beginning of the summer we took a little break from our traversing through the book of Romans. We've made it

through the first 11 chapters and in September we're going to pick up in Chapter 12 and go through the rest of the book, but for this summer we're just taking some individual verses or a couple verses out of each of the chapters and we're talking about them in a little more depth because they're verses that are really helpful. And so we're not really overly worried about everything that's come before it or everything that's come after it, we're just looking at this little verse. So today we're in Romans

WHAT ARE GOD'S PROMISES?

DOT DOT DOT | Week 5 | 7.21.2019

Chapter 4, if you have your Bibles you may want to open up to Romans Chapter 4, verses 21 & 22. These are two verses that I would encourage highlighting and I would really, in that verse, circle the word “promise” or underline it or highlight the word “promise.” This is what the verse says:

²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.”

~ ROMANS 4:21-22

It's talking about a man by the name of Abraham, a man you find written on the Old Testament pages of your Bible. I'll talk to you about him a little bit more but basically God had promised him that he would have many descendants, that from him would come many nations. And he had made this promise and Abraham said, “I believe you, God, I'm in.” And he waits and he waits and he waits and nothing happens. He's expecting that God's going to give him a child to create these many descendants but he's old, he's 86 years old and nothing is happening. Problem is, after 10 years and no child, he's sitting back saying, “I don't know if this can happen.”

Crazy thing is this verse says that convinced that God would be able to keep His promises, it says his faith was counted him as righteousness. But before he ever gets to that point, despite the fact that he believed God, that God would do this and could do this, he realizes not having it happen in front of him, *Maybe I need to do something; maybe I need to get involved in this process.* And so he does something that would have been relatively acceptable in that culture, he and his wife begin to chat, “We need to make this happen for God. It's not happening. We're not getting any younger. Maybe God wants to work through some different pathways.” And so they come up with this acceptable way in that ancient culture and that was Sarah suggested that she give Abraham her servant, a lady by the name of Hagar, to have a child with. And Abraham does that very thing, has a child with Hagar. That was not how God planned to doing it. I mean, God, if He promises something He fulfills His promise and He can get it done, but they circumvent that because God isn't acting in the timeframe that they expected.

Anyone ever pray and God not answer it immediately and think, *I guess God's not wanting to answer that question?* And He's saying, “Wait,” and we go, “I get that, but maybe I need to be doing something, maybe there's something more that I have to do.” And so they get active and Abraham has a child with Hagar. This child's name is Ishmael, and Ishmael becomes the father of the Arab nations and what we know of today as the Muslim world. Later on, God *would* give him the son of promise, Isaac, and Isaac would lead Israel and the Jewish nation. And to this day these two sons, the first one was not done the way God had wanted him to do it, these two sons, their countries and their nations would battle against each other, much blood would be shed. In fact, it explains all the stuff that is relevant in today's news



The result of leaning on one's own understanding and jumping ahead of God

when they're all trying to figure out who gets what land and why and all these ongoing discussions and peace talks. And we oftentimes ask the question: How is it that a tiny little dot on the map on the other side of the world could dominate the news cycle like the country of Israel does? But this is exactly why—because Abraham and Sarah decided we're going to run with God's promise and we're going to make this happen.

Now the cool thing is, despite the fact that they should have never done that, God is faithful. And God, despite our mistakes and our getting ahead of Him, our trying to make it work, our conjuring up in our mind how this oughta work out, God still works in the heart of a man who believes in Him and trusts in Him and God provides for Abraham and for Sarah a son by the name of Isaac. About 14 years after Ishmael was born He provides Isaac when

WHAT ARE GOD'S PROMISES?

DOT DOT DOT | Week 5 | 7.21.2019

Abraham was 100 years old, when Sarah was barren in the womb, and God provides this child, a promise. Just a little out-take and thought process on this that we need to put in the back of our mind: When we try to help God fulfill His promises, it never turns out good.

When WE try to help God fulfill His promises –
IT NEVER TURNS OUT GOOD.

And that's exactly what happened here. They tried to help God fulfill His promise and bad things came out of it in which we're still reaping the consequences of so many years later. And yet this passage here, God rewarding this man's belief when God makes a promise to him—and by the way, this promise to him was a promise to him only. Many promises in the Bible, but this was a promise he made to one man, by the name of Abraham. If I just go back in Chapter 4 to verse 18 it says this:

¹⁸ In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." ¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,

— and here's our verse —

²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."

~ ROMANS 4:18-22

He believed God and he was convinced that when God made a promise that God would keep it. You see, when God makes a promise He will rearrange the universe if He has to, to make that promise happen. And that promise didn't depend on human hands or human ingenuity or what an individual could pull together or make happen, that didn't have to happen. He merely had to believe in God, and the Scripture says in Luke Chapter 1, verse 37:

³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God."

~ LUKE 1:37

With God all things are possible—that's very contrary to the world that we live in where if we're going to make something happen we have to jump into action, we have to spring into action and go after it. When, in point of fact, when God makes a promise to us He always keeps it. And it's that lag time, that 10 years that we look at in this passage, that causes us to struggle a bit. And even with this guy whose faith was strong, strong, strong—God will do it—he gets a little bit anxious and jumps out ahead of God, which is something we're very familiar with doing. But all along this guy never stopped believing and having faith in God. But let me just say this because he commends him for his faith here, but let's put this into a focus here. Faith is not something that we have to make God do something that we want Him to do, or to make God do something that He doesn't want to do.

Faith

WHAT ARE GOD'S PROMISES?

DOT DOT DOT | Week 5 | 7.21.2019

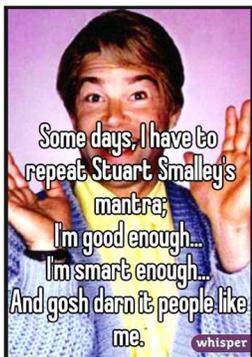
You're gonna hear a lot of people talk about faith a lot and they're gonna say, "Well, you don't have enough faith," or, "If you just had more faith," or "You need to get a little more faith." And if something's not going right they go, "Have a little more faith," and somehow you can conjure that up. Here's the other thing I see happening oftentimes, people come up and they're gonna speak a word over you. Now, you never saw what they said here in the Bible, it never existed here, but they're making something up and they're saying, "This is going to happen," or "You're going to do this," and then they tell you you're somehow supposed to conjure up enough faith and that will happen because I just got that word from God. And who among us is gonna argue with God if God just said something?

The problem is, anyone can come up with anything at any time that happens to enter into their mind, and you and I don't know if it's from God. And so we've got a lot of weird teaching on this subject of faith. Here's what faith is: Believing what God said. God said something and we can find it in here. We say, "I believe that and I'm gonna base my life on it. I'm gonna consider that the solid foundation." And like Abraham, be fully convinced that when God makes a promise He can and He will fulfill it.



And I think to myself how many sleepless nights—going back to some of those original things we talked about—how many sleepless nights have been wasted with anxiety? I mean, sleepless nights over fearfulness? How many sleepless nights over loneliness? And those things just building, building, building, building, building, and pressurizing with no solutions when we could have been stepping back and saying, "Well, wait a minute, what has God promised along those lines that I can base my life on? That I can base my thinking on?"

Now, if you've ever gone to a self-help seminar you normally hear them put together a line of thinking to try to help you solve this problem. And I just sort of grabbed a bunch of the thought processes that normally get shared, and I sort of put them together in just a generalistic way of what I've normally heard. And the first step oftentimes looks like this: Get in touch with your feelings. So, understand that anxiety, understand that fear, understand that loneliness, whatever it is just get your mind around that. And then they say, "Hey, understand your normal patterns of behavior." Understand because I'm lonely I jump on the computer and look at stuff that I shouldn't look at. Because I'm anxious I medicate. Because I am fearful I lash out and yell at people. And so they say recognize your normal patterns, and then they say, basically in the next step, start repeating certain mantras. Start saying things over and over like:



- ★ *I am a good person.*
- ★ *People like me.*
- ★ *I am doing the right thing.*
- ★ *I am successful.*
- ★ *I can do anything.*

And you start telling yourself these things and that's what they tell you to do. In fact, you'll hear this oftentimes, "Tell me nice things," "Feel-good vibes, I want to send out good vibes." And you go, "What's that all about?" And really, when you begin to put all of this together, this is all about self. What can I do what, what can I accomplish, what can I get—and here's where that all falls apart is it's all based on me and what I can do. And eventually I can't remember to do it anymore, I can't do it enough, or I come up short and I fail. And when we crash, in that moment we become absolutely overwhelmed. That's why the Gospel is such incredibly winsome,

WHAT ARE GOD'S PROMISES?

DOT DOT DOT | Week 5 | 7.21.2019

wonderful news because in the Gospel it's not about *my* works, it's about the work that **He** did on the cross. And so what we want to do here is think about this for a moment. In the selfishness of this is all about me, we come back to realizing that even if I replace these bad things in my neurological pathways with happy thoughts, I will go back to those neurological pathways eventually anyhow.

I listen to a lot of podcasts. I really enjoy that. I imagine a bunch of you do that, too. I learn a lot from those podcasts. I love hearing from different people, understanding their thought processes, but they all have a couple things that you can do because this is how they did it to get rich or to solve their problem or to deal with a relationship or whatever. And oftentimes what we see is that talking to us about those things, and I listen a lot of these things, "Oh, man, that's good." You know, you can really do better by doing that. And then the next day you hear another podcast and you forget what that was said and you just forget doing that, and you move on to this next thing. And eventually you get nowhere and you're not any further along.

And when I look at that and I say, "You know, maybe I need to take the focus and the attention off of me and what I can do and what I should do and how to do it, and put it on to God. He's the One who truly loves me. He's the One that made me. He's the One that created me. He knows me inside out. So much so He has every hair on my head numbered. He knows the thoughts and the ways of my heart. Maybe rather than me looking into myself, which the scripture says my heart is desperately wicked¹, or depending on someone else, whose heart is also desperately wicked. I need to look to the One who is holy and righteous Himself, who says "I love you with an undying love. I am faithful to you. I will never leave you. I will never forsake you," and grab onto Him.

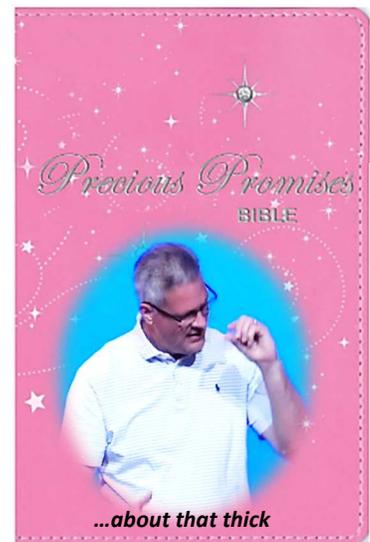
I want you hear a verse and I want to explain a problem I have, 2nd Peter Chapter 1, verse 4 says this:

⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature,

~ 2 PETER 1:4a

I want to say something about that verse. When I read the word *precious*, men, is that a very manly word? I don't think so. So when we talk about promises, precious promises, and yet you look at a guy like Peter. Peter was that a manly man? He was a manly man, but when I think of the word *precious* promises, I think to myself, the color pink comes to my mind. And when I think of that I picture a little book about this big by this big, about that thick sitting on a coffee table, it says Precious Promises. And when I open it, it has big chapter titles and little fluffy drawings and has a cute little promise from God that you're supposed to read every day. And I'm like, "Uh." [Laughter]

I'm gonna tell you, as I've been going through this study this week and I'm about ready to walk you through why I think this matters so greatly, when I hit 2nd Peter 1:4 and I read this precious promises, I realized this is why this whole promise thing has been a bit of a disconnect with me. And I don't know if it's been a disconnect with you, but it just feels, um, sort of soft to me.

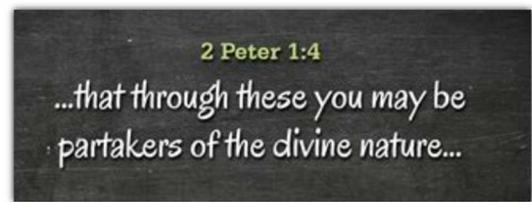


¹ *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? ~ JEREMIAH 17:9*

WHAT ARE GOD'S PROMISES?

DOT DOT DOT | Week 5 | 7.21.2019

What Peter's trying to say is this promise, these promises of God are precious. Something that's precious, now I think of something that's precious I use it in manly term, I think of gold or diamonds and something that is very fine and, you know, the very best and the finest of fine. These promises of God are going to allow you—listen to what it says here—



to “*become partakers of the divine nature.*” So if we could find the promises of God, if we could somehow believe those and accept those and become part of those, we could partake in divine nature; that we can overcome these deeply sinful neurological pathways that began back with a traumatic event sometime earlier in my life that has now created sinful responses ever since. If I could somehow refill that neurological pathway with the promises of God, I could have divine nature controlling me rather than fears controlling me, and anxieties controlling me, and finances controlling me, and other people's opinions controlling me. So how do we do that?

Oftentimes when you're hearing a message like, “Okay, here's what I want you do. I want you, you know, just focus in on the promises of God.” And you're like, “What are the promises of God?” Well, I'll tell you this...” I looked this up—I Googled it, you can Google it, too, because you'll probably come up with a different answer—7,487 promises in the Bible. Uh, if you Google it enough you'll find there's as many as 30,000 promises in the Bible—depends who's counted them. I didn't count them. If you want to be sure and you want to be exact, you're that way, count them this week. All I can tell you is that's a lot. So if they are 7,487 promises in the Bible, I did do simple math, and that would indicate to me, if I got the amount of days in the year right, that would be about twenty years of one promise a day that God has provided. So you could find one promise a day for the next twenty years and never repeat a promise that God has given to you. That's why I find it a little bit bogus when everyone's telling us what God wants for you but they can't defend it with the Scripture. God has given promises.

Now here's what the definition of God's promises are as I've weeded through that this week: The promises of God are things which He is unchangeably committed and on which the believer can totally depend. Take it to the bank. Guarantee you, if God of the universe said it, I believe it.



And here's why I say even it has to be for those who are believers in Jesus Christ, He made a promise that if we will put our faith and trust in Him, He will give us eternal life.² If we will come to the cross and ask for forgiveness of our sins, He will cleanse us of all unrighteousness and He will forgive us our sins.³ He will cast them as far as the East is from the West.⁴ He will take them and dump them in the deepest part of the ocean⁵ and attach them to something heavy so you will never see them again. If we can trust Jesus with that promise of forgiven sins, of an eternity with God, would we not be able to trust Him with verses that say things like Joshua 1:9⁶, “*be strong and courageous,*” I will never leave you, I will never forsake you.⁷

² Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. ~ JOHN 5:24a

³ 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

⁴ As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. ~ PSALM 103:12

⁵ You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. ~ MICAH 7:19

⁶ “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” ~ JOSHUA 1:9

⁷ Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” ~ HEBREWS 13:5

WHAT ARE GOD'S PROMISES?

DOT DOT DOT | Week 5 | 7.21.2019

I was just looking at Romans Chapter 8 this week, I mean, if you want to chapter full of promises from God, go to Chapter 8 of Romans and start like at verse 31:

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

~ ROMANS 8:31-32

And I'm anxious? I was thinking about this this week when I was thinking about these promises of God. There's this promise in Matthew Chapter 6, verse 26, it basically says this: God feeds the birds of the air, He clothes the birds of the air and gives them a place to stay in the barns, how much more will He feed you?⁸ I don't know what my deal is but, I mean, I was always fed all my life. I don't have a traumatic time when I went hungry, maybe an hour, but, I mean, I think about food all the time. I think about whether I'm gonna be able to be fed, whether there's gonna be enough food. What happens if we run out of food? So I have 5-gallon buckets of oatmeal and rice sitting around because I'm fearful that I'm gonna run out of food. And yet when I look—it's stupid, I know, but that's why I talk about food so much in here—but when I look at my Bible I'm reminded of the promises of God, that He provides. If He can provide for that bird of the air, He can provide for Lee Wiggins. And we begin to go through these promises and we begin to put them in our lives and let them overcome these deep neurological pathways that have been dug with stupid things that the enemy has told us for years that has caused us to act out in ways that has messed up our lives and taken us down paths we never wanted to go down.



What happens if we run out of food?

I was in talking with the pastors about this this week and I was sharing with one of them, just trying to have them help me think through how to get this across because I was seeing this as so powerful and so helpful to all of us. And Pastor Bob said to me, he says, “Well, you need to get the promise app.” [Laughter] Like, there's an app for this? “Oh, yeah, there's an app for this. The promise app.” And so right there in his office I downloaded the promise app and pulled it up and when it comes up it has, like, the promise of the day. But if you press the back button it's got this long list of topics. I mean, I'm just reading through them: anger, belief, boredom, children, communication, contentment, courage, death, depression, envy, faith, fasting, fear, financial hardship—I mean, just going through these and when you click on that topic it gives you all sorts of verses with the promises in them.



And as I looked at them, I'm like, “This is good,” because oftentimes will say, “Hey, read the promises in the Bible and act upon them,” and you're like, “I'm not sure what to act upon.” And so I would just say to you—it's why I put it up here on the screen—because they are a bunch of promise apps.⁹ It's not the only promise app, but the one Pastor Bob presented to me he says he uses all the time as he cares for you and the congregation. It says John 3:16 on it, has a little brown square around it. I'd encourage you to download it. I'm thinking man, that's awesome. Pastor Bob is so on top of things.

⁸ *Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?* ~ **MATTHEW 6:26**

⁹ App link for iPhone/iPad – <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/bible-promises/id306685844?platform=iphone>

WHAT ARE GOD'S PROMISES?

DOT DOT DOT | Week 5 | 7.21.2019

And I was talking to my kids later on in the week. I went, “You gotta hear about this promise app. It's so awesome.” And they're like, “Oh, yeah, Pastor John in the student ministry asked us to download this about five years ago. [Laughter] I'm like, guess I'm late to the party.

Hey, kids, you gotta hear about this promise app. It's so awesome!

Oh, yeah, Pastor John in the student ministry asked us to download this about 5 years ago.

LATE TO THE PARTY

Hey, if your kids aren't involved in our student ministries here, you see this up front here, you hear something like that, they need to be involved in our student ministries. I mean, stuff that's going on, what they're being taught, what they're getting as far as relationship with each other, the amazing unbelievable leaders, and it's not—I really wasn't planning on giving an advertisement for it—but if your kids aren't involved as student ministries get them in there. And I know they say they don't want to and they don't know anyone and all that stuff, just take them and drop them off and tell them you expect them to stay. It'll be a game changer for them. The kids this use [the promises app] and if you know people who have students, make sure they get here and come to this. I just love it, and like I said, that's been displayed to us here today.

But let me go a step further here for a moment. You've now downloaded the app, I see some of you doing it, you're allowed to use your phones in here. I know you're all fact-checking me along the way, some of you argue how many promises are in the Bible, some of you are already back in Genesis counting them, [Laughter] but, um, but again, let's go a step backwards and go okay—but okay, now I know all these promises, how do I somehow let those promises fill up those neurological pathways that have stuff in them that I can't seem to get out of that's keeping me awake at night with fearful thoughts and I wake up the next morning and I go, “Are you kidding me? I laid awake for four hours and now I'm exhausted out of my mind over something that doesn't matter? How do I get out of that?”

What I would say is you're gonna need to refill that with the promises of God, that's why having some promises and the categories in front of you just to meditate on and repeat, even repeat them out loud, is a huge big deal. But I was thinking about a verse of Scripture I think really helps activate this and it's Hebrews Chapter 4, verse 16, let me read it to you:

¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

~ HEBREWS 4:16

Grace, God doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Come before the throne of grace—how do we do that? Come to Him in prayer, the Scripture says come boldly¹⁰ before the throne of grace—let us do this—so that we can find mercy. God's not giving us what we deserve, and grace, God doing it for us what we cannot do for ourselves so that we can find help in a time of need. I believe if we would just start praying these promises, find your category, your category is different than mine, and start allowing these things to fill up your heart and your soul and your mind to change you and to transform you.

Let me read to you one more verse that I'd like to wrap up with here this morning, 2nd Corinthians Chapter 1, verse 20:

¹⁰ *So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.* ~ HEBREWS 4:16 (NLT)

WHAT ARE GOD'S PROMISES?

DOT DOT DOT | Week 5 | 7.21.2019

²⁰ *For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.*

~ 2 CORINTHIANS 1:20

Here's what we say in that: Yes, God has made all these promises. Twenty years' worth of them at one a day, but you're probably going to get stuck with 10 or 20 of them that you just keep on rotating through. And you come boldly before His throne of grace going, "God, You said that You will care for me. You said You will never leave me nor forsake me. You said You're always there for me. I need You now because it feels like everyone else has left me." And you just begin to pour out your heart claiming His promises He wants you to depend on.



What was the faith thing with Abraham? He was convinced that God could fulfill His promises. What was the faith? The faith is that I believe God can do it. I trust that He will do it. I believe that God will do what He said He will do. So what are we saying? We're saying our yes, I believe in the promises of God. And the word *Amen*, that just simply means You can do it—Yes, Lord, You can do it. Replacing that wrong thinking, filling it up with the promises of God and saying all the promises of God find their yes in Him. And that is why through Him we utter our Amen to God for His glory. Let me wrap up with the verse we started with Romans 4:21:

²¹ *fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.*

~ ROMANS 4:21

Yes. Are you? Can you do it? I haven't gotten the job done. Fully convinced that God can do what He promised [Applause] – that'll change you.

Lord Jesus,

As my dear friends in this room – we believe in You, we've put our trust in You. I pray that those who haven't will today and that we will walk out of here today fully convinced that You can do what You promise. And we'll begin to fill up our lives in those areas where we're weak trusting in You, on your promises, and repeating your promises back to You knowing that You can do it.

We love You Jesus. It's in Your Name we pray. Amen.

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WHAT ARE GOD'S PROMISES?

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