

JESUS: THE INDESCRIBABLE GIFT

Jesus: The Gift of God's Hope

Twelve Daily Studies for Christmas

Romans 4:18–24; 8:24–25; 15:13

SEARCHING
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STUDY



Quotable

Hope is a sense of confidence that God is at work.

It has nothing to do with age, marital status, or experience from the past. It has everything to do with the living God.

— Charles R. Swindoll

It was a rare moment when the apostle Paul couldn't find the right words to express spiritual truth, but when he put his pen to parchment to describe Jesus, no word came to mind. "Thanks be to God for. . . ." Paul must have paused to contemplate what to write next. The great theologian's vocabulary could have filled a dictionary, but he lacked the language to express the wonder of Jesus. So Paul penned, "Thanks be to God for His *incredible* gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15 NASB, emphasis added).

What puts Jesus beyond description is His divine nature. In Jesus, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas, "lives all the fullness of God in a human body" (Colossians 2:9). He "radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God" (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus embodies God's *grace*—divine favor toward underserving humankind. He embodies God's *truth*—reliable principles for living. And He embodies God's *love*—infinite compassion for sinners. God offers these gifts to us in the person of His Son, and as we receive them, we discover another gift in Jesus: *hope*.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

What do people hope for at Christmas more than material things, like a new TV or the latest tech gadget? Here are a few items that won't fit under the Christmas tree but may be on our wish list:

- Restoration of a broken relationship
- Healing of a physical ailment
- The return of prodigal child or grandchild
- Renewed joy after the loss of a loved one



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Who wouldn't trade all their Christmas presents for just one of these gifts? What are you hoping for this Christmas?

Offer to the Lord your heart's desires in a quiet moment of prayer. Ask the Lord to reveal His Son to you through your study of His Word and to renew your hope in Him.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Hope has been an integral part of Jewish life since the beginning. We might say that the Jewish nation was conceived in hope. Let's trace the origin of Jewish hope two thousand years before Jesus to the heart of the first parents of the nation of Israel, Abraham and Sarah. Read Paul's description of Abraham, who "believed in the God who brings the dead back to life and who creates new things out of nothing" (Romans 4:17).

Even when there was no reason for hope, Abraham kept hoping—believing that he would become the father of many nations. For God had said to him, "That's how many descendants you will have!" And Abraham's faith did not weaken, even though, at about 100 years of age, he figured his body was as good as dead—and so was Sarah's womb. Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises. (4:18–21)



Observation: Hoping for the Impossible

Observing a passage is the first step of the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study. Look again at Romans 4:18–21. Underline the key nouns and circle any key verbs that stand out.



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S10
2

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Twelve Daily Studies for Christmas

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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

What did God promise Abraham (*Genesis 12:1–3; 15:1–6*)? Why might this promise seem impossible to fulfill (*18:1–2, 9–14*)?

What convinced Abraham to keep hoping in God's "impossible" promise (*Romans 4:21*)?

Truly, it was Abraham's confidence that God would provide an heir that resulted in the Jewish nation. Hope, indeed, is in the nation's DNA.

This same tenacious confidence in God's promises kept the nation afloat for about fifteen hundred years through wave after wave of enemy invasions . . . until the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and exiled the Jews. All hope seemed lost, but the prophets buoyed the Jews' spirits with reminders of God's faithfulness, such as this word from the Lord to the captives in Babylon.

This is what the LORD says: "You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again. For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope." (Jeremiah 29:10–11)

Let's take a closer look at the context of these verses to discover the meaning of the passage.



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S10
3

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Jesus: The Gift of God's Hope

Twelve Daily Studies for Christmas

Romans 4:18–24; 8:24–25; 15:13

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THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY



Interpretation and Correlation: Putting Our Hope in God

After Moses freed the Hebrews from bondage in Egypt and Joshua led the conquest of Canaan, it seemed God's promises to Abraham had been fulfilled for good. Why, then, did the Lord remove the Jews from their land (*Jeremiah 17:1–4*)?

The people's sin may have lost them the freedom to live in their land, but their sin didn't lose them their *relationship with God*. What promise from God gave the exiles hope? To find the answer, read *Jeremiah 29:10–15*.

What attributes of God gave the people hope? None other than the same attributes we celebrate in Jesus at Christmas: *grace* to the underserving, *truth* we can count on, and *love* for sinners!



Application: Trusting in God's Plan

God's grace, truth, and love in Jesus offer us hope, even at times when we think all hope is lost. In his message, Chuck Swindoll offered this assurance:

Babylon isn't forever. Captivity isn't terminal. Let me add, the difficulties and challenges of the old year are not forever. God has plans for us that are filled with "a future and a hope."

What is one principle about God—as illustrated by His dealings with Israel—that you can apply today?



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Think back to the hopes you listed in the beginning of this study. How does the principle you mentioned above encourage you?

Tomorrow is Christmas, the day we celebrate the birth of the one true hope of the world. Thank the Lord on this Christmas Eve for the promises He fulfilled in the past, and trust Him to continue fulfilling His promises in the future.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the hope I have in Jesus. How powerful is this hope! It fuels my life when I await Your answers to my prayers today. On this side of Your yet-to-be-fulfilled promises, I lean on Your attributes to keep me hoping. I lean on You and wait with confidence in Your grace, truth, and love. In the name of Jesus, amen.



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S10
5

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Twelve Daily Studies for Christmas

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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY



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Hope is a sense of confidence that God is at work.

It has nothing to do with age, marital status, or experience from the past. It has everything to do with the living God.

— Charles R. Swindoll

For centuries, righteous Jews have put their hope in the coming of the Messiah. They've lived on tiptoe, looking toward the horizon for the Promised One to arise like the dawn of a new day to restore Israel as a nation and rekindle the people's devotion to the Lord.

With joy, Paul proclaimed to his fellow Jews in Rome who were awaiting the Messiah, "I believe that the hope of Israel—the Messiah—has already come" (Acts 28:20)! But Paul added, Jesus came to save *all* people, not just the Jews, and to establish the kingdom of God, not just a new nation for Israel. How did the Jews receive Paul's teaching? "Some were persuaded by the things he said, but others did not believe" (28:24).

Unlike the skeptical Jews in Paul's day, Christians have received God's gift of Jesus with open hearts. We celebrate the fulfillment of past hopes in Him, and we anchor in Him our hope for the future. Ring the bells on Christmas morning! The hope of the world has come!



PREPARE YOUR HEART

God's promise to Abraham that "all the families on earth [would] be blessed through [him]" (Genesis 12:3) was fulfilled at the birth of Jesus. Aging Simeon, who had hoped to see the Messiah before he died, saw God's light for the nations in Jesus when he took Jesus in his arms to bless Him,

*"Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace,
as you have promised.
I have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared for all people.
He is a light to reveal God to the nations,
and he is the glory of your people Israel!" (Luke 2:29–32)*



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Twelve Daily Studies for Christmas

Romans 4:18–24; 8:24–25; 15:13

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Simeon saw in Jesus “salvation . . . for all people” and “a light to reveal God to the nations.” Invite the Lord to shine Christ’s light on you and your family today and fill your home with His peace and joy. Pray for those you love who may be living in darkness. Ask the Lord to open their eyes to the light of hope in Jesus so they can receive Him as their Savior this Christmas.

Now let’s open the Word to discover the hope of Christmas for which the whole world searches.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Most people think of *hope* as the feeling they get when they buy a lottery ticket. They hope they will be a winner but with no certainty. In contrast, God offers us a sure hope because it is based not on chance but on a person: Jesus. Because Jesus is trustworthy and the words of Scripture are reliable, our hope is more than wishful thinking; it’s confident faith. Let’s take a few minutes to look at the crucial connection between faith and hope.



Observation: The Connection between Faith and Hope

Read the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.
(Hebrews 11:1 NASB)

According to this verse, what element does faith add to our hope?



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Twelve Daily Studies for Christmas

Romans 4:18–24; 8:24–25; 15:13

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

In the previous study, we traced Israel's hope to Abraham. Let's pick up where we left off in Romans 4 to observe the connection between Abraham's hope and his faith.

Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises. And because of Abraham's faith, God counted him as righteous. (Romans 4:20–22)

What was the reward of Abraham's faith?



Interpretation and Correlation: Our Faith Is Credited as Righteousness

Paul explained the significance of Abraham's faith:

And when God counted him as righteous, it wasn't just for Abraham's benefit. It was recorded for our benefit, too, assuring us that God will also count us as righteous if we believe in him, the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. (Romans 4:23–24)

What is our assurance, according to verse 24?

Abraham's faith is a prototype of the faith of every person who seeks a relationship with God. "It is impossible to please God without faith," wrote the author of Hebrews (Hebrews 11:6). In faith, Mary and Joseph believed God would give them a miracle child, Jesus. In faith, the wise men, like Abraham, came from the East seeking God's promised child (Matthew 2:1–12). And in faith, we cling to our Savior at Christmas and put our hope in the redemption He won for us through His death and resurrection



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Twelve Daily Studies for Christmas

Romans 4:18–24; 8:24–25; 15:13

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Application: Bringing Hope into Life

When we wish for something, we sometimes say, “I’m getting my hopes up!” This kind of hope goes up and down, like a hot air balloon that is carried along by winds of fortune. However, our hope in God is certain. It is based on God’s promises and character in the person of Jesus, not on hot air and shifting winds. Be assured, God *will* make good on His promise and deliver us to the ultimate land of promise: our Father’s eternal home (John 14:1–3).

According to Chuck Swindoll in his message,

Biblical hope begins with an attitude of faith in things we are promised regarding the future. Hope grows as faith counts God’s promises as true.

Close this Christmas study by expressing to the Lord your hope in Jesus, the baby in the manger, in whom our future rests secure.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for offering me more than wishful thinking. Others may wish for a better future or have a “hunch” that things will improve, but in Christ, my hope is certain. Once again, I place my confidence in You and the promise of eternal life in Your Son. While I can’t describe the details of how You plan my future, I can depend on You and Your character. In You, I have a future and a hope for today and always. Amen.



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THE
SCRIPTURES

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In the weeks leading up to Christmas, we knelt beside Mary and Joseph at the manger and joined their adoration of God's gift to the world. We imagined eternity in the eyes of the Christ child, who "existed in the beginning with God" (John 1:2). We recognized Jesus as the embodiment of "the very character of God" (Hebrews 1:3), in whom we saw:

- Grace—divine favor toward undeserving humankind
- Truth—reliable principles for living
- Love—infinite compassion for sinners
- Hope—resilient confidence in a certain future

Soon, we'll take down the tree, tuck away the twinkling lights, and box up the nativity set. And yet, while the figurine in the manger may return to storage, God's gift of Jesus—a gift "too wonderful for words" (2 Corinthians 9:15)—remains in our hearts.

As we anticipate the New Year, we'll focus on Jesus as the gift of God's hope by examining three principles hidden in three Hebrew words for *hope*; these principles will carry us through whatever unknown lies just around the bend.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

To prepare your heart today, read a verse we introduced in the study on Day 10.

For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."
(Jeremiah 29:11)



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

As you pray before opening the Word, thank the Lord for His plans for the coming year. In the space below, express any concerns you may have about your future, and ask the Lord to help you fully embrace God's hope in Jesus.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Because God is all-knowing, He is fully aware of every hill or valley, twist or turn in your life's journey. And because He is all-powerful, He can carry us through whatever rough roads stretch just beyond the horizon. God "gives power to the weak," Isaiah assured us (Isaiah 40:29), and then the prophet described what happens when we wait for Him.

*Yet those who wait for the LORD
Will gain new strength;
They will mount up with wings like eagles,
They will run and not get tired,
They will walk and not become weary. (Isaiah 40:31 NASB)*

Let's use the *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method of observation to identify in this verse the first aspect of hope which is highlighted in the word *wait*.



Observation: What Do Hopeful People Do?

Wait is the verb form of the Hebrew word, *qavah*, which, interestingly, is translated "hope" in Jeremiah 29:11—God's plans "give us a future and a *hope*." There is an apparent connection between hoping and waiting. What do hopeful people do? They wait for the Lord.

According to Isaiah 40:31, what does the Lord do for us through our period of waiting?



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S12
2

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Romans 4:18–24; 8:24–25; 15:13

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

What else do hopeful people do? We need look no further than Job, a man of resilient hope. Job declared,

*“Though He slay me,
I will hope in Him.”* (Job 13:15 NASB)

This Hebrew word translated “hope” is *yachal*, which Job expressed through his determination to endure. Specifically, Job kept on hoping even through the worst of his suffering. What does James 5:10–11 tell us about the outcome of Job’s enduring hope?

We observe a third aspect of hope in the Hebrew word translated “confident” in Psalm 27:3.

*Though a mighty army surrounds me,
my heart will not be afraid.
Even if I am attacked,
I will remain confident.*

The word translated “confident” is *batach* in Hebrew, which describes an attitude of trust amid threatening circumstances—so that the psalmist can say, “my heart will not be afraid.”

So people who put their hope in the Lord, first, wait for Him, second, endure through trials, and third, trust the Lord for their future.



Interpretation and Correlation: What Principles Can We Understand?

Let’s interpret what we’ve observed by formulating principles, which are timeless truths that summarize the meaning of a passage. Think of principles as bridges of truth from the past to the present. In his message, Chuck Swindoll gathered from these verses three requirements of hope and three results, which he formulated into principles.

- Hope requires waiting, which strengthens us.
- Hope requires enduring, which brings patience.
- Hope requires trusting, which results in relief.



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Jesus: The Gift of God's Hope

Twelve Daily Studies for Christmas

Romans 4:18–24; 8:24–25; 15:13

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Now you try. Look back at the verses you just read and formulate a principle that emerges from each Hebrew word we highlighted.

Isaiah 40:31

Principle about waiting:

Job 13:15

Principle about enduring:

Psalms 27:3

Principle about trusting:

Application: How Can We Apply God's Gift of Hope This Coming Year?

Often our tendency when we feel stress is to worry about the future rather than hope in the Lord. Instead of appreciating God's strength as we wait, we *rush* ahead and feel worn out. Instead of growing in patience as we endure, we *complain* and feel irritable during delays. And instead of experiencing the relief of trusting that God will handle our situation, we *push* for results only to feel defeated.

What circumstances or people are causing you stress or filling your heart with worry?



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Jesus: The Gift of God's Hope

Twelve Daily Studies for Christmas

Romans 4:18–24; 8:24–25; 15:13

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Stress and worries could have weighed down Jesus, but He placed His hope in His Father—and His hope is available to us today. In a concluding prayer, tell the Lord that you put your hope in Him. Reflect on the stresses and worries in your life, and use the following space to express your thoughts to the Lord. Specifically, write down how you intend to wait, endure, and trust instead of rush, complain, and push.

Let Chuck's concluding words in his message guide your week:

Every day we have a choice. . . . Each day could be a day in which your imagination will go to work, take charge of you, rule your life, and fill you with fear. Or you could say, "Lord, these hours are un-lived. I have no clue what they will include, but I want You to know I'm Yours. I'm trusting You, and I will walk with You. I will rely on You."

May this prayer from Paul be your guiding verse for the new year. Receive God's gift of hope in Jesus, and truly put your confidence in Him!

I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.
(Romans 15:13).



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, right now, as I step into the New Year, I release all my fears to You. You are strong and powerful, full of grace, truth, and love. Help me face whatever challenges may come with "confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit." Fill me with Yourself through Your Son, Jesus, and it is in His name I pray, amen.



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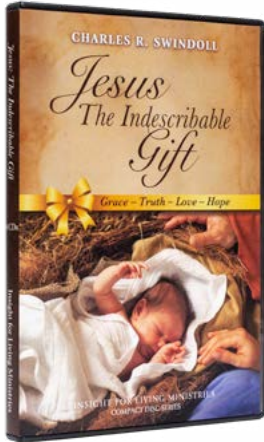
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STUDY



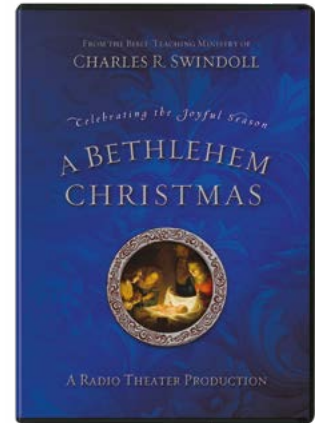
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For the 2018 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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