

Fully Convinced

Emory Cothen

Life Lessons - NK | July 19, 2026 | Romans 4:19-21

Prepared from the spoken message and lightly edited for readability. Scripture quotations and spoken phrasing are preserved as delivered.

Man, that'll get you fired up, huh? The grave is still empty. The stone is still rolled away.

We're going to be in Romans chapter 4 this morning. If you have your copy of God's Word, join with me there. We're going to be in verses 19, 20, and 21. It's three verses. Don't get your hopes up. We were right on time last hour, so it should probably take the whole time.

As we continue in this Life Lessons series, it had me thinking. It had me a little bit introspective, if you will. I've been thinking about what kind of man, husband, father, and pastor I am going to be and continue to be. What kind of life lessons have I learned? What areas of my life do I maybe still need to grow in?

As I was reading through Romans in my personal time, I got to chapter 4 and these three verses, and they just popped off the page and into my heart. They kind of summarized what I've been trying to articulate in my own life: I want to be a man, a husband, a father, and a pastor who is convinced that God is able. Despite the circumstances, despite how I feel, despite what's going on around me, I want to be convinced in every part of my life that God is able.

I've been watching - it's kind of this time every year that Netflix comes out with a new season of a documentary on NFL quarterbacks. I don't know if you've watched it, but it's kind of a behind-the-scenes view of what these quarterbacks do in a season, on and off the field. Having no idea what NFL quarterbacks do, I found it really interesting.

What I've found while watching this show is that every single one of these guys is completely convinced that they were put here on this earth to be an NFL quarterback. They do not lack confidence. You know what I'm talking about? Because of that, their whole life reflects it. Their money and how they spend it revolves around that. Their time, their friends - everything revolves around the simple fact that they are convinced they are supposed to be doing what they're doing.

My question for you as we get started this morning is: What does your life reflect? What are you convinced of?

For some context before we read these three verses, this is Paul writing to the early church in Rome, and what he's doing is commending Abraham for his faith. God had promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations, but this comes to him when he was about 75 years old, and the child of promise doesn't come to him until he's almost 100 years old.

Some of y'all are in your mid-40s, and you're like, "Dude, I'm already good where I'm at." But this was a significant promise. If you received this word from the Lord, you would probably start pointing to some

circumstances in your life. But Abraham is commended for his faith.

Let's read these verses, and then we'll break them down one by one and look at some application for our lives. Romans chapter 4 says:

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.

No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,

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

— Romans 4:19-21

Fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised.

If you're taking notes this morning, there are going to be notes and Scriptures on the screen as we go along. I'd encourage you to write them down.

Our main point today - so when you go to lunch and somebody asks you, "What'd you learn?" tell them this. I hope you pay attention beyond this, but you'll get it right here: You are either convinced of your Savior or of your circumstances. You are either convinced of your Savior or your circumstances.

The flow that we'll follow this morning is very simple, one point for each verse: Abraham faced his circumstances, Abraham glorified God, and Abraham was convinced of God's ability.

Circumstances Can Describe You, but They Cannot Define You

Look back with me at Romans 4:19:

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.

— Romans 4:19

Hear me out on this. After God gets ahold of Abraham, Abraham responds differently. The first time God tells Abraham that he's going to be the father of many nations doesn't go so great. If you've read through the book of Genesis, you're probably familiar with someone by the name of Ishmael.

Abraham doubted God in the past, but what we're going to talk about today - what he's commended for in Scripture - is when he's focused on his God instead of his circumstances. He didn't doubt God when he looked at his limited ability. Abraham believed and hoped while there were no grounds for hope from a human perspective.

Can you maybe identify with that this morning?

One commentator said, "To be weak in faith is to allow doubt to cloud and partly undermine that belief." Abraham did not weaken.

Go ahead and write this down: Circumstances can describe you, but they cannot define you.

If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you may be going through all sorts of stuff that maybe none of us even know about. Maybe you've been keeping it really close to the chest, and you're going through the fight of your life right now. But those circumstances, no matter what they may be - good, bad, or ugly - can describe us, but they cannot define us.

In the third century A.D., there was a woman named Perpetua. This was after Jesus, and she was the daughter of a wealthy, influential man who was a nonbeliever. She gave her life to Christ, and at about 22 years old, as a Christ follower, she gave birth to her first child. She had a newborn.

In this day, in this age, and in this place, it was not advantageous to be a believer in Jesus. Word got out that she was a professing Christian, that she confessed Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. They came and arrested her, and the punishment for this was death.

With a newborn, she's sitting in a jail cell waiting to be killed in the arena. You can imagine the tension in her family at this point. Her father is a nonbeliever. She's a believer. She's in jail, awaiting her death.

Her father comes and visits her in jail and pleads with her. He says, "Hey, read the room. You're young. You have a child. I have influence and wealth and money. All you have to do is tell someone that you were making it up, like you just had a bad day. You're not really a follower of Christ. That's all you have to do."

He was pointing at all the circumstances and all the things she could use to get out of it. They're sitting there in that room. Could you imagine her talking to her father, who's begging her to abandon her faith while she's holding her newborn?

She points in the room to a vase, and she says, "Just like this vase cannot be called anything other than what it is, so I cannot be called anything other than what I am: a Christian."

They give her time for her child to get a little bit older and be weaned. Then she goes with another woman who is a believer into the arena, and they are killed. They're martyred for their faith. But she went without denouncing her Savior. She didn't point at her circumstances. She didn't point at anything else. She kept her eyes on the Lord.

Let me ask you this morning: How much time have you spent fixated on your circumstances? How much time as a believer have you lost thinking about all the things that are around you, or maybe even some of the things that are going on inside you, in your head and your heart?

Let me tell you this morning: If you're struggling, you're in good company. Abraham and Sarah struggled too. Abraham didn't always live the way that he was commended for. After God spoke to him, there was a long time when nothing happened.

Does that feel familiar to some of you in the room? You know who God is. You know what He said. But you feel like it's silent right now. In that time of waiting, they took it upon themselves and tried to do God's job for Him. That's where Ishmael comes from. If you don't know the story, you can read it this week.

But write this down: When our circumstances dictate our decisions, we get Ishmael, the son who represents Abraham trying to do God's will for Him. But when the promises of God dictate our decisions, He gives us Isaac.

Isaac was Abraham and Sarah's child, born to Abraham around the time he was 100 years old. Could you imagine that? But he was the son God gave Abraham who defied everything you and I would describe as possible.

Giving Glory to God

Abraham isn't focused on his circumstances. What is he focused on? Look with me at Romans 4:20:

No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God.

— Romans 4:20

He grew strong in his faith in the middle of all this going on. Abraham trusted God because God is trustworthy. He believed God because He's good and He keeps His Word.

Giving glory to God is simply giving Him what He's due. Because God is trustworthy, we trust Him. Because God has never broken His promises, we can believe Him even when we haven't seen that promise come to fruition in our own lives yet.

The opposite of Romans 4:20, growing strong in your faith, is Romans 1:21. Some of you may have memorized this:

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

— Romans 1:21

What does that mean? Their unbelief made them waver. They took their eyes off the God they knew about and fixated on their circumstances, and that determined their lives.

This is a danger we face culturally: We, or people we know, may know about God or even know Him personally, but they don't honor Him or give thanks to Him.

John MacArthur says, "Faith in God, because it affirms His trustworthy character, is the supreme way that men glorify Him, while without faith, any attempt to worship, praise, or honor Him is a worthless, self-righteous sham."

Our faith is important. There's an idea in this verse that the strength we see is drawn from the promise of God, and the weakness we see comes from doubting that very same promise.

We come to a crossroads. Will you believe it? Will you be confident in it? Will you grow in your strength spiritually, in your faith, or will you doubt it and then grow weaker?

Abraham sets the example for us in this. He was surrounded by every reason not to believe. If somebody told you today that by the time you're about 100 years old you're going to have a kid, put that in your mind. At 105, you're in the kindergarten pickup line. That's what I kept coming back to. I'm like, "Good night. I don't know if I could do that."

Abraham sets the example for us in this while surrounded by every reason not to believe. I'm not so naive as to think we didn't all walk in here with some kind of reason not to believe. There's some struggle in your life, some doubt in your life, some circumstance, some thing in your life that makes you say, "Man, I know about God, but this thing is so real that it's hard for me to keep my eyes on Him."

Let me encourage you this morning: The unwavering believer does great things for the kingdom of God. When our eyes are focused on Him alone, when our concentration is on Him alone, and when our life's mission is on what God has called us to do, great things can happen.

Abraham never takes his eyes off the reality and the truth that God is greater than everything else, so he believed in the Lord in the midst of struggle. This is why we're talking about him even today. It's not that he was perfect. It's that he grew strong in his faith by trusting the Lord. It wasn't by his grit. It wasn't by his resolve.

For us this morning, when you and I are convinced of our circumstances, what we're doing is glorifying either ourselves or our worry. But when we're convinced of our God, we glorify Him, and in that process, our faith grows.

Strong faith is from God, but it's for God. The God who gives us the strength to be obedient to Him does it for the purpose of us turning around and glorifying Him every step of the way.

Like Peter walking toward Jesus on the stormy sea, like Daniel in the lions' den, and like Abraham being told that he would be a father at 75 but not receiving the child of that promise until nearly 100, we can have reasons to doubt all around us. But it's important that we keep our eyes on the Promise Keeper.

I don't know about you, but some of the believers I know who have the strongest faith of anybody I've ever met are those who have kept their eyes on Jesus right in the middle of difficulty. Their strength came from God, and it was used to glorify God.

I remember a few years ago, I met with Dr. Gary Cook, who was the president of Dallas Baptist University for 35 years. He's now the chancellor. While I was there in my undergrad, he took me under his wing and became a mentor.

In fact, I have a picture on the screen of us on a prayer walk together. He has no idea I took that. You can't really tell who he is, but it's special to me. We were on a prayer walk together.

You can take it down now.

I was meeting with him at this kind of crucible in my life. You've probably been there, where you're making decisions and you have a lot of question marks beside all the decisions you're making.

He talked to me about his first couple of years as the president of DBU, when they were in debt. Everybody

said the university was going to go belly up and that he was just the fall guy for it.

I said, "What did you do when it felt like everything, all the circumstances, was just falling apart? What was the secret? What'd you do?"

He said, "Every morning, I would get out of bed, get on my knees, and simply pray this: 'God, what would You have me do today?'"

I said, "That's great. So really, what'd you do?"

He said, "No, Emory, I did just that, and that's what you need to do."

When you're making decisions for your life, what's your goal? Where does your strength come from? Are you trying to do it to glorify yourself or to glorify the Lord?

If you're trying to glorify the Lord, every day you can ask this question: "God, what would You have me do today?" When we do that, it will lead to us honoring the Lord instead of worrying about the circumstances.

"God, today, what would You have me do?" Tomorrow has enough worry of its own, but, "God, help me keep my eyes on You."

For us this morning, let me tell you: Don't quit. Don't lie down. Keep moving forward, giving glory to God every step of the way, every day asking, "God, what would You have me do this day?"

I don't doubt that your circumstances are tough. But what I know about circumstances is that every one of them is temporary, and we serve a God who is eternal. We keep our eyes on Him, and as we do that, our strength and our faith will grow, and we will give glory to Him.

Fully Convinced God Is Able

Look with me at verse 21:

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

— Romans 4:21

Fully convinced. It's the title of the sermon. It's the focus of the day. It's what you need to get out of this. Go ahead and underline or highlight "fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised."

I love how the NASB says this:

and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.

- Romans 4:21 NASB

What God promises, He will perform.

Every part of Abraham was convinced that God was able to do what He said. He was able to perform what He promised.

One thing I love about this verse is that there's an image that comes with it. Imagine your life as a cup of water, or some kind of container. One commentator said that Abraham was so filled to the brim with faith that there was no room for doubt.

Think about your life. You might have some faith, but is there doubt that keeps creeping in? The model, the example, and what Abraham was commended for is that he had so much faith that there was no room for anything else to creep in.

He didn't just believe in the promise of God. He believed in the God who made it.

Imagine a faith like this, where there's so much faith that there's no room for doubt. Abraham had seen God perform what He had promised. That's exactly how we should respond to what Jesus has done for us.

If you know Jesus, if you've put your faith and trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, then you believe He went to Calvary and died on a cross as a perfect, spotless Lamb for your sin and for mine. He was buried in a grave, just like what we sang, but three days later He was raised from the dead. If we follow Him, we can be raised from the dead as well.

If you believe this, this is a faith that can leave no room for doubt.

Abraham has a faith like this - a faith in Jesus for all that He's done for us. We have a God who has promised to make a way, a God who has promised never to leave us or forsake us, and to cast our sins as far as the east is from the west. We have a God who supports those whose hearts are blameless toward Him, whose grace is sufficient, and whose power is made perfect in weakness. We have a God who lifts us up, who cares for us, who hears our requests, and who begins a good work in us and will carry it forth to completion.

That's the God we can have faith in.

The Christian faith addresses all of who we are: We were totally sinful, and Christ died to make us totally free. Our faith should be one that defines all of who we are.

Think about this: We should be fully convinced because God is fully able.

We should be fully convinced each and every day, not because we try to be convinced, but because we are watching our God, we have read about our God, we have experienced our God, and we believe beyond a shadow of a doubt that He is always able.

But so often, what we do is acknowledge our God and become convinced of our circumstances.

That's a huge part of my testimony. I gave my life to the Lord when I was very young. I walked an aisle at a conference and told everybody that I was giving my life to the Lord in vocational ministry. I knew God had called me to serve in the local church with my life. That was my vocation. That was what I was supposed to do.

I knew this, but - have you ever had a moment like that? You know what God says, but...

It was the spring of my junior year of high school. This is a huge part of my story. If you've heard it before, I'm sorry, but God's only given me one testimony, so I'm going to share it anyway.

I can remember that practice field in Beaumont, Texas. It was like concrete. The grass wasn't really even there, and it was the hottest late May I could ever remember in my life. Every time we would cut block, tackle, or do anything like that, we'd fall on the ground and come up with stickers. You know what I'm talking about?

I walked to my car barefoot last week, got one sticker, and was like, "I quit. I want to go home. I don't want to do this anymore."

That was the field during that off-season and spring training. I just remember the heat, the field being so hard, and those stickers on every play.

But that spring, I made a plan for my life while knowing what God had called me to do. I looked around, and although I knew God and knew I was called to ministry, I started to forge a different path forward. I looked at my circumstances, and I kind of liked what was going on in my life outside of this whole Jesus thing.

I started to look at the fact that I was doing pretty well at football and was getting scouted. I started paying attention to what was going on around me. My girlfriend at the time had an older brother who was the starting middle linebacker at Air Force, and they were recruiting me. I thought, "Well, that's a pretty good gig right there, huh?"

I was making a plan for my life where I was going to go play ball for four or five years, serve my country, and then maybe, maybe, maybe one day down the line, I would get back to this whole ministry thing.

I remember I was playing left tackle. Let me see if I can still get down here. I know this is pretty impressive, but I remember I was in my stance. Look at that! I've still got some eligibility, I think.

I was in my stance. The quarterback said, "Hut!" I went and pass blocked and just grabbed the guy. It was kind of the end of practice, and we weren't really trying hard. I did what you're never supposed to do as an offensive lineman: I stopped moving my feet.

My best friend in the world, from sixth grade on, was our star middle linebacker. He came around, made a routine play, and tackled the running back while I was blocking this guy. They fell straight into my left leg, and I snapped my tibia and my fibula. I have a rod from my knee to my ankle in this leg.

I'm telling you, I was lying on that concrete practice field with the stickers, the heat, and everything, and I was screaming. I was screaming. Yeah, it hurt, but I was screaming because I knew before I hit the ground that every plan I had made for my life based on my circumstances had just vanished.

I'm not kidding you. That summer, all the scouts went away. All the offers went away. I don't know if this is related, but my girlfriend moved out of state.

The Lord began to speak to me that summer in ways I could understand: My ways are not better than His. The promises of the world and the circumstances - maybe even the good things the world can bring me - pale in comparison to His promises and what He does, even if His timing looks different. My circumstances are not greater than His power, and nothing can stop what God has promised.

Now I stand before you convinced that God's way is better. I've tried the other route. Have you?

I am convinced because I've seen it and because I've tried the alternative. He will make a way where there is no way. If He says it, He'll do it.

I am convinced that He loved me enough to break me of myself and call out the sin in my life, because I had made a god out of the circumstances in my life instead of worshiping Him.

Without the grace of God in my life to break my leg, I probably wouldn't have gone to DBU. I probably wouldn't have met my wife. I probably wouldn't be standing before you today. But I am convinced that my Savior is greater than whatever my circumstances may be. My life belongs to Him fully.

Let me tell you this morning: What you are convinced of will form your convictions. Think about it. The decisions you make are a reflection of what you're truly convinced of. You can acknowledge God, but it's clear when your life revolves around the circumstances you're building up.

Here's some good news for you. As great as this faith of Abraham is, Romans chapter 4 doesn't end with verse 21. There are a few more verses, and they'll be on the screen.

All this talk about being fully convinced doesn't make any sense if you're just trying to muster up faith and resolve on your own. You and I can never be faithful on our own. We cannot be righteous on our own.

What God did in my life after my leg was broken was a grace of Him, the sovereignty of His will in my life, and me trusting in Him. It wasn't because I just got better and did more moral things after that.

The last few verses of chapter 4 tell us where this righteousness comes from. Look at verse 22:

"That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."

But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone,

but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

— Romans 4:22-25

We can be counted as righteous not because of our work, but because of our faith in the God who did all the work. Our God raised Jesus from the dead, and we have been forgiven our trespasses. We have been justified. What a privilege that is.

What Is Holding You Back?

Let me ask you this morning, Champion Forest: What is holding you back from being fully convinced that God is able? Only you can answer that.

As we come to the close of our message and go into worship again, I have two application points very briefly, and then we'll close.

The first is maybe for you if you're a believer and you're struggling. If you know who God is, but maybe you've been taking your eyes off Him and paying attention to the circumstances of your life, this is what you can do.

First, identify the circumstance that causes you to doubt God's ability. Maybe you're not calling it what it is. It's kind of what your life is revolving around right now, but you haven't called it that: "This circumstance in my life is actually now what my life revolves around, what my eyes are on, and what I'm fixated on. Because of that, doubt has crept in, and I am not fully convinced of God."

Secondly, and this is for all of us, we can experience God and His promises. It's available for each and every one of us in the room this morning.

What I mean by that is I don't think you and I have ever been convinced of something we haven't experienced. Maybe that's the problem. You know about God, so you acknowledge Him, but you're convinced that your circumstances have the final say in your world because you've never experienced God and His promises for you: that He loves you, that He'll never leave you, and that He will always provide what you need.

Maybe you've never personally experienced the Savior of the world, and today is the day you can be all in with following Him. You're making up your mind. You're leaving no room for doubt. You're committed.

Maybe today is the day you will be fully convinced that our God is able.

Let's pray together.

With your heads bowed and your eyes closed, this is for you to think about, with no distractions and no one leaving. Have you experienced God? Are you convinced He's able? Or are you thinking about that circumstance? Are you thinking about that thing? Are you thinking about that factor in your life where, man, you know God's good, but maybe, truth be told, you don't think God is great enough to overcome that thing?

Our team's going to be here as soon as I say amen - pastors, prayer partners, men and women who love you and love the Lord and want nothing more than to pray with you, process with you, cry with you, and point you to Jesus. Whatever it is you need, I can tell you this right now: Lunch is not more important than speaking with somebody if God is moving in your life right now.

My prayer is that we would be a people and a church who have seen God do what He says and seen God perform what He promises. Because of that, we would be fully convinced. No room for doubt. Completely convinced that God is always able.

Heavenly Father, we love You. God, we thank You for this time. God, I pray right now for every person in this room and for every family represented. God, I don't know what people are going through, but You do.

God, I pray for people right now who are maybe contemplating coming down and talking to somebody. God, would You give them boldness? God, would they be exhausted from trying to figure this out on their own? God, would they come to the end of themselves in this process of living life dictated by circumstances?

God, I pray that we would leave here today as a people who are convinced that You are infinitely able. God, You will never be exhausted. You will never run out.

God, we thank You for the strength You give us. I pray that this morning, this day, this week, and with our lives, we would give You the glory and the honor You're due.

God, we pray that You would receive the praise You are worthy of.

It's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.