

**PLEASE DON'T READ THESE NOTES UNTIL YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR LESSON.  
HEARING GOD FOR YOURSELF IS WAY BETTER THAN MY COMMENTS!**

**Note to Facilitator:**

You may not want to take the time to have all the references from Genesis (Question 1) read out loud in small group. Rather, have your group members share parts of their summaries from each reference in Genesis until all the events and promises mentioned are covered.

**Also:** The most important concepts in this lesson are covered in the last section "**Recipe for Faith**," starting with **Question 9** to the end. Watch your time and be sure you have adequate time to discuss this section. : )

## Questions

In **Romans 4**, Paul uses the example of Abraham as "proof" that we are *justified* (made right with God and granted a righteous status) by *faith* in what **Jesus did for us** and not by **works** (deeds that we do), or by **circumcision** (religious practices), or by **keeping the law** (living by a set of religious rules). (See definition for *justification* in Lesson 5.)

1. Paul assumes his readers know all about Abraham. So, to understand his reasoning in this chapter, we need to be familiar with Abraham's life and the promises God made to him. Read the following verses from **Genesis** and summarize the event and/or promise.

### Genesis 12:1-5, 7 -

God called Abraham to leave his own country and go to a new place that God would show him. He promised Abraham that he would bless him, make him into a great nation and that all the peoples of the earth would be blessed through Abraham. When he got to Canaan, God told him that he would give him this land to him and his offspring.

### Genesis 15:1-6 -

Several years later, when Abraham seemed anxious and afraid, God again promises Abraham that his will have a child of his own and that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars.

**Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.**

**Abraham believed the Lord, and the Lord declared him righteous because of his faith.**

### Genesis 17:1-11, 15-16

When Abraham was 99 years old, God again confirms his promise to Abraham. He told him that he would be the father of many nations; he changed his name from Abram (exalted father) to Abraham (father of many). God established an everlasting covenant with Abraham and his descendants to be his God and the God of his descendants and to give the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants. As a sign of this solemn promise, every male in Abraham's family (and offspring) was to be circumcised. This was a constant reminder of God's promise. God promised that Abraham would have a son with Sarah, his wife, and that she would be blessed too, becoming the mother of nations and kings.

♥ What, specifically, was God promising to do when he said that he would *bless all the peoples of the earth through Abraham* and that *Abraham's offspring would be as numerous as the stars*?

This promise has great relevance to the followers of Jesus Christ. God was telling Abraham that one of his descendants would be the promised Messiah that would come and save people from their sins. All people (Jews and Gentiles) would be blessed through this descendant of Abraham. God also promised that the offspring of Abraham (the Jewish people but also the followers of Christ) would be as numerous as the stars. If you have been justified by faith in Jesus Christ, you are one of the offspring spoken of here.

**Read Romans 4:1-8.**

2. As he often does, Paul begins to make his point by asking and answering a question. In your own words, *what is the question* Paul asks and what does he say is the *wrong answer* and the *right answer* to his question (4:1-3)?

The question: What shall we say about Abraham concerning the matter of being saved by faith? Was he saved (did God accept him) by works or good deeds? No!

The Bible tells us that Abraham was saved by his faith in God and God's promises and because of his belief, God credited (declared) him righteous.

Paul uses Abraham as an example because he was the founding father of Israel (the rock from which they were cut – Isaiah 51:1-2) and the avored recipient of God's covenant and promises. Also, Abraham was held in highest esteem by the Jewish rabbis and the Jewish people (hero status) and they took for granted that Abraham had been justified by works of righteousness. Paul wants to show from scripture that this was not the case – and if Abraham was justified by faith and not works, the same is true for us.

♥ What, exactly, did Abraham believe in order to be declared righteous (**Genesis 12: 2-3; 15:4-6**)? Abraham not only believed that God was going to give him and Sarah a son from their own bodies, but Abraham also believed that God was going to bless all the people of the world through the offspring of that son and that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars. In effect, he was believing that **one of his decedents would the promised blessing and salvation of the whole world**.

How is it that we believe the same thing Abraham believed, although in a different way?

Jesus is a descendent of Abraham and it is through Him that all the peoples of the earth are blessed because he came to **"take away the sin of the world"** (John 1:29) and **"came to save his people from their sins"** (Matthew 1:21). If we have accepted what Jesus did for us by faith, we are considered to be one of those offspring that are as numerous as the stars!

The nature of our faith today is the same as Abraham's despite the difference in time. Abraham looked forward to something God would do (John 8:56; Gal. 3:16) and we look back at what God provided in Christ. The Old Testament people were saved by believing the Messiah/Savior would come and on this side of the cross, we are saved by believing in the Savior that has come. There is only one way to God and it is by faith in Jesus Christ. Abraham believed before the Jesus came and we believe after the Jesus came, **but we are both believing the same thing**.

♥ A person may boast before others or entertain boastful thoughts in secret, but why can no one boast before God (4:2)?

We can not boast about anything before God because God is God and we are not! He is the Creator and we are his creation. To boast before God would imply saying, "Give me what I rightfully deserve because of what I have done." Being given only what we deserve would be our worst nightmare! To boast before God shows that we don't understand the depth of our own sinfulness (especially pride) and it shows disrespect and disregard for who God is.

3. Wages are earned by doing work and gifts are received (4:4-5). What does this have to do with *justification*?

The NIV translation uses the word "credited" in 4:3-5. This is a financial term that means that means to put something into someone's account. There are two different ways that money can be credited to an account. One is by wages (which are earned) and the other is as a gift (which is free and unearned. When a person works for what they get, their wages are an obligation. A gift is unearned and is given without obligation. Justification is a gift given to us when we believe or trust God's promises. God is not obligated to give us this gift because we have worked for it and earned it as wages. Righteousness (right standing with God) is a gift put into our account by God as a gift and we become aware of this gift when we receive it by faith. Even Abraham had a sin

debt that his good works could not offset. He could not earn God's favor. So he accepted God's plan to save him by faith and it was credited to his life ledger as righteousness when he believed.

- ♥ Why do you think some people would rather work for a right standing before God rather than accept righteousness as a gift?
  - ♥ What do you see are some advantages of being granted righteousness before God as a *gift* given through faith in Jesus rather than a reward earned through *works*?
4. How is King David's sin (2 Samuel 11) and God's forgiveness (Psalm 32:1-2) an example of justification by faith and not works (4:6-8)?

King David's sin of adultery and murder are well known, as is his repentance and God's forgiveness. David knew there was nothing he could do to earn forgiveness and right standing before God. These things were given to him as a gift and this quote from Psalm 32 is his testimony of thanksgiving for the gift of right standing before God that was given to him by God's grace, not because he earned it or deserved it, but because God gave it to him. We, too, are forgiven in the same way!

- ♥ It is easy to feel that God accepts us only when we are good or do good things. How does David's example prove otherwise?
- ♥ Since a right standing with God does not come by works that we do, we might be tempted to think that good deeds are optional and not important. From the following verses, what do you learn about good works and how God uses them (Ephesians 2:10; Titus 3:8; Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 2:12)?

These verses point out the good deeds or works are very important and are, in fact, proof that our faith is real. Good works, however, do not earn us a right standing with God. We simply cannot be good enough to offset our debt of sin.

- ♥ In what area of your life do you need to do more believing? More working?

**JUSTIFICATION (being declared righteous in God's sight) IS NOT BY RELIGIOUS PRACTICES**

**Read Romans 4:9-12.**

5. Abraham was born a Gentile, not a Jew. Consider the three events from his life listed in **Question 1**. At what juncture in Abraham's life do you think he become a Jew and the patriarch of God's chosen people through whom the Messiah, Jesus Christ would come? Explain your answer.

Circumcision was the identifying mark of a Jew – a sign of the covenant (promise) God made to his chosen people. **Genesis 17:9-11** is the point when Abraham was marked as different from the Gentiles around him.

6. In **4:10**, Paul asks if Abraham was granted right standing with God *before or after* he was circumcised. What is the answer? **Before he was circumcised. Abraham was justified through faith in Gen. 15:6 and his circumcision was not until Gen. 17.**

According to **Acts 15:1**, what were some teachers in Paul's day teaching? How does the example of Abraham disprove this idea (**Romans 4:11-12**)?

Jewish teachers in Paul's day were saying that unless a person was circumcised, they could not be saved. Paul is showing the circumcision has nothing to do with faith and right standing with God. If God had called and justified Abraham before he had a son, then he was not at that time a patriarch; and if God had justified him before he was circumcised, then he was not at the time a Jew! In other words, Abraham was an uncircumcised Gentile when he was he received righteousness by faith through grace as a gift from God. This is the same principle that we will see in Romans 5:8 – "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

All of this proves that we don't and can't earn our right standing with God by doing or keeping religious practices. Religious practices are important and have their place, but they are not what earns us favor in God's eyes.

- ♥ Was Abraham's circumcision the *cause* of his right standing before God or the *sign* of it (**4:11**)? Abraham was circumcised after he was declared righteous by God. Circumcision was not a saving work, but only a sign of the righteousness Abraham already possessed through faith.

- ♥ What are some religious customs, rituals and solemn ceremonies that are practiced in your religious tradition? What do these practices personally mean to you? Are your religious rituals and ceremonies the *cause* of your right standing with God or a *sign* of them? How so?
- ♥ What did the apostles and elders in Jerusalem conclude over the issue of circumcision and salvation (**Acts 15:2-11**)? If the apostles and elders could meet today over current concerns in the body of Christ, what might be some issues they would need to discuss?

**JUSTIFICATION (being declared righteous in God's sight) IS NOT BY KEEPING GOD'S LAW**

Read **Romans 4:13-17**.

In **4:13-17**, Paul is writing to Jewish Christians who believed that the promises given to Abraham in Genesis were for Jews only and if Christian Gentiles wanted to be included in these promises, they would need to be circumcised and obey the Law along with believing in Jesus as the Messiah. Paul is showing that the recipients of God's promises are not for Jews who keep the law; but rather, the promises are for Jews **and** Gentiles who have *been made right with God through faith in Jesus*. Abraham did not receive the promises of God because he kept the law (which had not been given yet.) Abraham received the promises of God the same way we do – through faith (**4:13**).

7. God promised that Abraham and his offspring would inherit the world (**4:13; Gen. 17:4-6**). Who is Abraham a spiritual father to and who are his offspring (**4:11-12, 16-17**)?

Abraham is the spiritual father of those who have not been circumcised (not Jewish) but have faith AND he is the spiritual father of those who have been circumcised **IF** they have the same kind of faith that Abraham had. **Abraham is the father of all who believe!** That is what God meant when he promised to make Abraham the "father of many nations" – Gen. 17:4-5. Abraham is the spiritual father of all believers, both Jews and Gentiles. Those who share Abraham's faith are his spiritual offspring, and will come from "every tribe and language and people and nation (Rev. 5:9)

- ♥ What requirement would Abraham and his descendents or offspring have to fulfill in order to receive the promises of God (**4:13**)?

The requirement is that they be made righteous in God's sight by FAITH and then they, too, are heirs of God's promises to Abraham.

- ♥ Do you consider yourself an offspring of Abraham and an heir to the promises given to him and his descendents in Genesis? Why or why not? If so, when did you fulfill the requirement to receive the promises given to Abraham (**4:13**)?

8. Paul says faith has no value and that the promises of God are worthless if the only people who can receive them are those who keep the law. Why is this so (**4:14-15**)?

If keeping the law is the way we receive God's promises, we would never receive God's promises because keeping the law is impossible. A promise that is contingent on doing something that is impossible would make the promise worthless and there would be no reason for faith. Faith would be useless.

The purpose of the law is to show us what is right and wrong. A society that does not consider stealing a crime would have no thieves. How can we know we are sinners and what is right and wrong if there isn't some standard? God's law is the standard. He did not give it to us so that we would try to follow all the rules. He gave us the law so we would know that it is impossible to try to earn a right standing with God by keeping his rules. When we understand that, we are more likely to just accept God's gift of righteousness by believing that he, indeed, can and will give it to us!

- ♥ What are some reasons why it was so important for Paul to demonstrate that Abraham was justified by faith and not by keeping the law (**4:16,17**)?

If Abraham was justified by keeping the law, then faith is useless and God's promises are meaningless. Paul is showing that it is keeping the law or faith; it is one or the other – not both. Also, faith is possible for anyone and keeping the law is impossible for anyone!

- ♥ What are two things you learn about God in **4:17**?

God gives life to the dead (brings the dead back to life) and calls things that are not as though they were (brings into existence what didn't exist before).

What are some examples from Abraham's life where God has done these things?

God brought life (a son) from Abraham's body that was as good as dead because he was 100 years old and Sarah's womb which was also dead. God also made Abraham the father of many nations with offspring more numerous than the stars. God brought into existence something that did not exist before.

Other examples from the Bible? **Jesus' resurrection (and others too) and Creation (creating the world out of nothing by speaking it forth. Both of these demonstrates God's POWER.**

Examples from your own life?

♥ What situation are you facing that requires faith in the God of *creation* and *resurrection* (4:17)?

<b>RECIPE FOR FAITH</b>
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Read **Romans 4:18-25**.

9. God promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations and that his offspring would outnumber the stars. Yet Abraham and Sarah were childless. Fill in the chart below to discover Abraham's response to this dilemma.

Verse	What did Abraham do?
4:18	against all hope, Abraham in hope believed
4:19	Without weakening in his faith he faced the facts (that his and Sarah's bodies were incapable of conceiving a child)
4:20	He did not waver in believing God's promise, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God
4:21	being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised to do

♥ What promise from God are you longing to see fulfilled in your life? How can Abraham's "**Recipe for Faith**" help you in *your* dilemma?

♥ Do you equally believe the promises that different people make to you? If not, what makes the difference? How does this apply to believing God's promises?

We usually believe the promises of someone depending on who they are and how trustworthy they are or have been in the past. We believe God's promises because of WHO HE IS. The better we KNOW God, the easier it will be to trust him.

♥ Where do we place our faith: in *God* or his *promise*? What is the difference between these two?

The promise is worthless (not matter how good it may sound) if the person making it can't deliver. We place our trust in God and we believe his promises to us because of his character and his power.

♥ What is the difference between *trusting* God for something and *asking* him for something?

**Asking** God for something is to ask him to do something that he has not necessarily promised to do. We are encouraged to do this. Matthew 7:7 – "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you." James 4:2 – "You do not have because you do not ask God." **Trusting** God means we expect him to give what he has already promised, but that which we have not experienced yet. In Abraham's case, God promised a son and that Abraham would be the father of many nations. Abraham believed or trusted God's promise (acted as if it were true) even before it happened. He was so sure that God would make good on his promise that he thanked God and gave glory to him (Gen. 4:20) even before he experienced the reality of the promise. There are many promises already given to us by God in the Bible. Faith is trusting God to do what he said he would do. (We need to **know** the promises before we can trust God to make good on them. That is why reading and studying the Bible is so important!)

10. How can you know for sure that you have a right standing before God (**Romans 4:23-25**)? Just like Abraham, God **will declare us righteous** too if we believe God and his promises concerning what Jesus did for us in his death and resurrection. We will see later in Romans that Jesus took all our sins upon himself, dying in our place to pay the penalty for our sin. **Faith is believing and receiving what Jesus did for us.** If we believe (trust) what Jesus did for us, God gives us righteousness – a right standing with him! There is no other way to gain this right standing with God!

♥ What was the whole purpose of Jesus' death and resurrection (**4:25**)?

He was handed over to die because of our sins and he was raised from the dead to make us right with God!!

### *Response*

If we are going to exercise faith in order to attain the promises of God, it is important to know exactly what faith is. Below are several definitions of faith. Which definitions help you the most in understanding what faith is and how to exercise it? Share with your small group the "why" behind your choices.

- Faith is confidence that God is who he says he is and he will do what he has promised to do.
- Faith is quiet, thoughtful trust in the promises of a God who is known to be trustworthy.
- Faith is the alignment of heart, mind, and will with God's truth and promises.
- Faith is like the eye. It does not create what it sees; rather, it sees what is already there.
- Faith is acting as if all of God's promises are true, regardless of our feelings or circumstances.
- Faith is being fully persuaded that God has the power to do what he has promised to do.
- Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

How and for what will you exercise faith this week?

BELOW IS THE SUPPLEMENTARY SCRIPTURE FOR THIS LESSON THAT CAN BE PRINTED OUT FOR SMALL GROUP TIME.

## NIV

**Genesis 12:1-5, 7** The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. **2** "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. **3** I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

**4** So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. **5** He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

**7** The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

**Genesis 15:1-6** After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

**2** But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" **3** And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

**4** Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." **5** He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

**6** Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

**Genesis 17:1-11, 15-16** When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. **2** I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." **3** Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, **4** "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. **5** No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. **6** I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. **7** I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and

your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. **8** The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God." **9**

Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. **10** This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. **11** You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.

**15** God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. **16** I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."

**Ephesians 2:10** For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

**Titus 3:8** This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

**Matthew 5:16** In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

**1Peter 2:12** Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

**Acts 15:1** Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."

## NLT

**Genesis 12:1-5, 7** Then the LORD told Abram, "Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you. **2** I will cause you to become the father of a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and I will make you a blessing to others. **3** I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you."

**4** So Abram departed as the LORD had instructed him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. **5** He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all his wealth—his livestock and all the people who had joined his household at Haran—and finally arrived in Canaan.

**7** Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I am going to give this land to your offspring." And Abram built an altar there to commemorate the LORD's visit.

**Genesis 15:1-6** Afterward the LORD spoke to Abram in a vision and said to him, "Do not be afraid, Abram, for I will protect you, and your reward will be great."

**2** But Abram replied, "O Sovereign LORD, what good are all your blessings when I don't even have a son? Since I don't have a son, Eliezer of Damascus, a servant in my household, will inherit all my wealth. **3** You have given me no children, so one of my servants will have to be my heir."

**4** Then the LORD said to him, "No, your servant will not be your heir, for you will have a son of your own to inherit everything I am giving you."

**5** Then the LORD brought Abram outside beneath the night sky and told him, "Look up into the heavens and count the stars if you can. Your descendants will be like that—too many to count!"

**6** And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD declared him righteous because of his faith.

**Genesis 17:1-11** When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; serve me faithfully and live a blameless life. **2** I will make a covenant with you, by which I will guarantee to make you into a mighty nation." **3** At this, Abram fell face down in the dust. Then God said to him, **4** "This is my covenant with you: I will make you the father of not just one nation, but a multitude of nations! **5** What's more, I am changing your name. It will no longer be Abram; now you will be known as Abraham, for you will be the father of many nations. **6** I will give you millions of descendants

who will represent many nations. Kings will be among them!

**7** "I will continue this everlasting covenant between us, generation after generation. It will continue between me and your offspring forever. And I will always be your God and the God of your descendants after you. **8** Yes, I will give all this land of Canaan to you and to your offspring forever. And I will be their God.

**9** "Your part of the agreement," God told Abraham, "is to obey the terms of the covenant. You and all your descendants have this continual responsibility. **10** This is the covenant that you and your descendants must keep: Each male among you must be circumcised; **11** the flesh of his foreskin must be cut off. This will be a sign that you and they have accepted this covenant.

**15** Then God added, "Regarding Sarai, your wife—her name will no longer be Sarai; from now on you will call her Sarah. **16** And I will bless her and give you a son from her! Yes, I will bless her richly, and she will become the mother of many nations. Kings will be among her descendants!"

**Ephesians 2:10** For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

**Titus 3:8** These things I have told you are all true. I want you to insist on them so that everyone who trusts in God will be careful to do good deeds all the time. These things are good and beneficial for everyone.

**Matthew 5:16** In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

**1Peter 2:12** Be careful how you live among your unbelieving neighbors. Even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will believe and give honor to God when he comes to judge the world.

**Acts 15:1** While Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch of Syria, some men from Judea arrived and began to teach the Christians: "Unless you keep the ancient Jewish custom of circumcision taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."