**TIME ALONE WITH GOD**

Ingredients:

* Half an hour, every day.
* Quiet, so you focus on yourself and on God;
* Prayer, worship, thanksgiving, as your response to God
* Word, so you can ponder His truth
* Life, people and events, so you are aware of Him in these situations

Method:

* Time – a fixed time when you are unlikely to be interrupted is best but more important is to actually start having such a time with God.
* Quiet – A simple method is to be quiet until you are aware you are in God’s presence before you start to respond to Him.
* Word – Read and be familiar with what is said. Meditate on the Word: “What does it say?” “What does it mean?” “How should I respond?” You may use the questions to help you or set them aside.
* Life – Use the time to also be aware of the things that are happening, inside you and around you. Bring these before God and speak to Him.

# Monday and Tuesday

[**ROMANS 4:1-12**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%204&version=NIV)

Remember this is your time alone with God. It is a time to tell God what is on your mind (thinking back over the past day), listen to him speak to you (reading and meditating on a bible passage), and finally, to respond to him (prayer). The questions are there to help you do this. Ignore them if they do not help. If your time is limited, I suggest that you don’t do everything in one go but spread them over the two days.

1. Take time to be quiet so you can focus on your time alone with God. Recall and briefly write down any significant things that happened or occupied you the past day. Share with God what you thought or felt. Pray also for those he has laid on your heart.
2. Read [ROMANS 4:1-12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%204&version=NIV). Write down what you think the passage is about and what it says to you. Feel free to use the questions in “Further Thoughts” to help you think over the text.
3. What is God saying to you? Write down a prayer in response.

**Further Thoughts**

1. *What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”* We should read the reference to boasting not so much in terms of bragging as much as that Abraham could claim some degree of accomplishment deserving of reward. It is important to Paul to note that nothing that Abraham did deserved any credit from God, except that Abraham believed God. Why was Abraham so significant that Paul used his life experience of God to emphasise that faith and not works that is the key to our relationship with God?
2. *“Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.”* Paul now makes clear the distinction between works and faith. Does this make sense to you? Why is it so important to discount works; aren’t they good?
3. *“Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before!”* This next part of Paul’s argument, about circumcision, is mostly significant to Jews but it will help us understand the place of baptism, being a part of a church, and partaking in the holy communion, in a Christian’s life. How would you describe the place of these sacraments (well, belonging to a church is not a sacrament but you almost always need to belong to a church to receive the sacraments) in the context of the Gospel?
4. *“So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is then also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.”* Note how carefully Paul summarises his conclusion. What is his key emphasis?

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**ROMANS 4:13-17**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%204&version=NIV)

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1. Take time to be quiet so you can focus on your time alone with God. Recall and briefly write down any significant things that happened or occupied you the past day. Share with God what you thought or felt. Pray also for those he has laid on your heart.
2. Read [ROMANS 4:13-17](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%204&version=NIV). Write down what you think the passage is about and what it says to you. Feel free to use the questions in “Further Thoughts” to help you think over the text.
3. What is God saying to you? Write down a prayer in response.

**Further Thoughts**

1. *“It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, because the law brings wrath.”* In this next stage of Paul’s argument, the focus is on the promises of God made to Abraham and his descendants. He argues that righteousness is ours only by faith because we all fail when the law is applied. If that is the case, then surely God’s promises are intended for those who are Abraham’s descendants by faith (because they are righteous) rather than by law and circumcision and birth. How does Paul describe the promise of God? Which of God’s promises to the descendants of Abraham (that you know of) is most significant to you? In Paul’s argument, we are the true recipients of those promises. How do you feel about that?
2. *“Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.”* At this point, Paul introduces the word “grace”. Why does the truth that the promise comes by faith means that it is by grace, and that it is therefore a certainty for all of us who believe? How do you understand “grace”?
3. *“He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.”* Paul now says that we who receive the righteousness of Christ by trusting him are the true descendants of Abraham. That means that all the promises God made in the Old Testament, all the statements of love, faithfulness, judgement and redemption, forgiveness, blessing, and destiny, are ours. How does that sound to you?

# Friday and Saturday

[**ROMANS 4:18-25**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%204&version=NIV)

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1. Take time to be quiet so you can focus on your time alone with God. Recall and briefly write down any significant things that happened or occupied you the past day. Share with God what you thought or felt. Pray also for those he has laid on your heart.
2. Read [ROMANS 4:18-25](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%204&version=NIV). Write down what you think the passage is about and what it says to you. Feel free to use the questions in “Further Thoughts” to help you think over the text.
3. What is God saying to you? Write down a prayer in response.

**Further Thoughts**

1. *“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.”* How did Abraham express faith? How do you express faith? Is faith a matter of believing what is unbelievable (and what is unbelievable is different from person to person) or is it a matter of trusting a person (whether or not that is an easy or difficult exercise)? Do we have faith in a person or in specific statements or promises made by them? In other words, when we can believe some promises of God but not others, is that a contradiction of our trusting God? Is faith “all or nothing” or is there room to grow in faith? Is it possible to trust a person but not trust him for everything he says? What does Abraham’s life example teach us about this?
2. *“This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.” The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”* The idea of “credit” means that we are not really righteous when we have faith but God nevertheless counts our faith as righteousness because of what Christ did. Here, the notion of Christ’s resurrection by the power of God helps us to see what God can and will do for us. If at one time we were dead in our sin, what happens when we put our faith in Jesus?

# Sunday

##### FAITH, NOT WORKS

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

Abraham was the father of the Jews and all that the Jews enjoy from God flowed through him. God’s relationship with Abraham then is key to understanding God and how he intends to relate with all who seek him.

Abraham was by no means perfect in his walk with God. He relied on deception to try to protect himself and he agreed with Sarah to sire a child through Hagar, her maid. But God saw in him faith that God is one who keeps his promises, who determines the future, who is just and righteous and who will not contradict his own character and will. I’m sure that in his time gods are seen as more powerful versions of man—capricious, selfish and beholden to no law or morals, yet Abraham believed God to be morally righteous, trustworthy, true, and fully able to keep his promises.

Abraham believed God, and we are told that God credited it to him as righteousness.

When we understand that anything we can do or offer to God is worthless—because where we succeed in one point we fail in a thousand others—then we know to discard the paltry deeds (which are mostly about what we don’t do anyway) and the external forms with which we try to pretend would make us better than others.

Paul described Abraham as having faith “against all hope”, even in the face of reality, “being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised”. Faith is not believing in the impossible but believing that God can and will do what he had promised, whatever the odds. Faith is all about God; works is all about us.

What we need to understand is that there is nothing we can do to save ourselves—only God can. When we believe that he is who he says he is then we are grasping the only hope we have. When we instead try to do what we can to save ourselves, not only are we acting in futility, we are also denying his love and grace.

It is amazing that he chooses to save us freely; all he asks of us is that we trust that he is who he is, and that he will do what he says he will do. This is grace.

*The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.*

1. Review the answers/thoughts you wrote down in the past week. Read the short sharing above. Does it add anything to your own thoughts?
2. What is God saying to you? Write down a prayer in response.