

**Message: “Renewed by Faith”**

**Joe shares his story.** “Neither my mother nor myself were Christians. I had no idea and had never been to church. My mother, though teaching at a Catholic school, was not a Christian and had no interest in becoming one. We were true unbelievers. The only reason my mother had been to church was to accompany her class to Thursday church sessions. One day I was given a Bible. Later at home, I was sitting on my mother’s bed talking to her while she was in another room.

**I asked my mother to choose a number between 1 and 10.**

‘4’ she replied. ‘Choose another number between 1 and 10,’ I asked. ‘7’ was her answer. ‘Now a name,’ I said, ‘Matthew, Mark, Luke or John’?

**My mum started to think this was one of those games** where I was going to tell her she was going to marry a man with one of those names, have 4 cars and 7 children, or such like!

**Mum chose Mark, so I read Mark 4:7,** *‘other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain.’* As I read, she felt the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Now we both glorify our Lord Jesus. The person who handed out those testaments would never have known the two lives they impacted.”<sup>1</sup>

**God is not dead, but living and active in the world today,** reaching out to everyone and saving anyone willing to take a chance and accept God’s mercy, grace and love. This is how we are renewed by faith.

**Faith is significant and meaningful, but what is faith?**

If you are a well-watered woman, “faith is the confident assurance and trust in things hoped for and not yet seen. It is more than just a feeling or blind optimism. It is an active, grounded conviction in the character and promises of God, often manifesting in actions regardless of present circumstances. It is trust that drives action and connects individuals to the divine.”<sup>2</sup>

**There’s a lot to unpack there, so let’s focus on the synonyms.** Faith is confidence, assurance, conviction, belief and trust. Faith moves us to act. Faith connects us to God and to each other. Faith renews our soul.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://gideons.nz/testimonies.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://wellwateredwomen.com/what-is-faith/>

**This sounds like something everyone would want**, except for a few people who embrace chaos. And yet, the number of people who profess faith in God has steadily decreased over the past 60 years or so.

**What's going on?** Good question. I doubt any of us truly understand the reasons why there's an ebb and flow to faith. There have always been ups and downs. Paul's letter is a good example.

**Paul is writing to an eclectic group**, who has connected, gathering to worship God, be in communion together, and care for each other and the people around them. The members are Jewish and Roman citizens, along with people from other countries. There are rich and poor members, educated and uneducated, those who know the Law of Moses and those who don't. They're all wrestling with their "why."

**Paul teaches them, and us, about salvation.** And he's blunt: no one is saved. No one has earned the right to be in God's presence (Romans 3:23). In churchy lingo, none of us are righteous. We can't be right with God on our own. Our lineage or culture or goodness isn't enough. Our deeds aren't enough. There's no task we can do to secure a place in heaven. We need help from a higher power.

**And Paul is very clear:** the Torah, the books of Law written by Moses, won't save us. He compares following the Law to going to work and doing what you're asked. What we earn by working isn't the same as what is expected for us to be right with God. The Law can't save us.

**This is where love enters the picture.** We are saved and given new life by God's love, through mercy and grace. This gift is available to everyone. All we have to do is have faith and trust God's promise.

**What is God's promise?** We can be children of God by faith.

**Paul tells us Abraham was credited with righteousness because he believed God.** He didn't earn credit by what he did. Abraham wasn't entitled to be seen as righteous. He simply trusted God. And he did so 400 years before Moses wrote the Law. The Law didn't save him.

**This means that when God recognizes the rightness of our faith,** God isn't rewarding our good deeds but showing grace. Trying hard to be good doesn't impress God. When we have faith and allow God to work in and through us, we're being like Abraham. We're right with God.

**This is how Abraham became the ancestor of us all.** Our bodies, minds and appetites – our flesh, don't define him or us. It's the Spirit. We are joined in the Spirit, made one family, relatives in the Spirit. We are connected to the very presence of God, which accepts us and blesses us over and over again. This is God's promise fulfilled.

**“We aren't defined by flesh or by Law,” says Paul.** We are defined by, and given life by, the God who brings the dead to life and calls into existence things that didn't exist before, like hope, acceptance, belonging, forgiveness, transformation, and abundant life.

**And when our inner being is connected to God,** our outer self receives blessings, and we do good things naturally. This is how those around us see God's grace gifts in action, by what we do with love, how we respond to trials and when we forgive.

**One of our challenges is this: we make believing into work.**

All too often, we want to order or organize God's Spirit. We want the formula for new life. We want to know what we can do. We fall into the same, old arguments: law vs. gospel, faith vs. works. We want to work our way into the kin-dom. We want to earn our space in heaven. And again and again, we have to be told we're misunderstanding something significant.

**Jesus says, “I've done the work.”** Each of us is on the threshold of a new life, looking for cues. Abraham is the prime example of what it means to believe. It's not work, not an effort on his part. It's also not something that is rewarded. It's an orientation, a way of being.

**It's how you see the world.** “Go,” Abraham heard, “Go to a land I will show you.” Remember? He didn't hear, “Here's your destination. I've made all the reservations and gassed up the car.” Abraham was to go to *some* place that would be revealed at *some* point. He was just told to go. And, the amazing thing is, Abraham went. This is the faith that renews our life.

**Why do you have faith?** God is pleased by what you do and how you live, but God wants to know why you have faith. Faith shapes our inner and outer being, what we think, say and do. Faith shapes the way we treat people, those close to us and those we don't know, those who are like us and those who are different from us.

**I invite you to spend some time** during this season reflecting on why you have faith in Jesus. I believe it will renew your life.

**Together, let's move forward in our life's journey, guided by God's promise, the promise of presence, acceptance and grace.**

*Let us pray ...*

### **Romans 4:1-8 (CEB)**

So what are we going to say? Are we going to find that Abraham is our ancestor on the basis of genealogy? Because if Abraham was made righteous because of his actions, he would have had a reason to brag, but not in front of God.

What does the scripture say? Abraham had faith in God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Workers' salaries aren't credited to them on the basis of an employer's grace but rather on the basis of what they deserve. But faith is credited as righteousness to those who don't work, because they have faith in God who makes the ungodly righteous.

In the same way, David also pronounces a blessing on the person to whom God credits righteousness apart from actions:

*Happy are those whose actions outside the Law are forgiven,  
and whose sins are covered.*

*Happy are those whose sin isn't counted against them by the Lord.*