Abram’s Call October 3, 2021

**Bible Verses:** Genesis 17:1-8

**Spark Story Bible:** pages 27 to 33

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Overall Lesson Takeaways

* **What does it mean to be blessed? What does it mean to be a blessing?**

God’s blessing of Abram can be an opportunity for kids and adults to reflect on the many blessings that we have in our lives – and think about how we can be a blessing to others. Most of us would probably answer the question of what it means to be "blessed" differently, but God's promises to Abram establish a good starting place: a place to call our own (land), family (descendants), and being afforded respect and dignity (name). That is an overly simplistic answer, of course, but it also provides us a challenge: we know that those three things don't exist for everyone in our world today. As people who have been the beneficiaries of God's blessings in our lives, I believe that we, like Abram, are called to work so that "all families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3), whether in a place to call home, or dignity and respect for all.

* **The important promise of home, safety, and belonging.**

God’s promise to Abram of a new home is one that can feel particularly relevant to the conversation above – because feeling like we belong, we are safe, and we are loved are some of the most critical needs of children. This passage can be an opportunity to talk about what we love about our own homes and families, but for older students it can also be a window into talking about a much bigger and more complicated issue: the growing refugee crisis taking place in our world today. The number of refugees fleeing homelands has increased sharply every single year for the past decade: in 2010, there were an estimated 34 million refugees worldwide; in 2018, the number is believed to be over 80 million. How are we called as Christians to respond?

* **How do we respond to big changes in our life?**

Human beings, by and large, are risk-averse – preferring to stay with what we know, even in the face of opportunity. Abram's response to this massive charge from God, though, is barely half a verse. In Genesis 12:4, it says: "So Abram went, as the Lord had told him". Well that was easy! Surely Abram must have wrestled with the magnitude of what was being asked of him, even though God's promises were appealing. Abram's willing acceptance to God's call (even if there was unnamed wrestling off the page) is a reminder that sometimes our only response to God's unexpected call should be one of faith. We may not consider ourselves prepared, but we trust that God will help lead us and empower us to live into that call fully.

Checking In

**Before the reading:**

* **Check in with the kids – welcoming any newcomers warmly.**
  + Younger kids: Look ahead to Halloween – costume ideas??
  + Older kids: Highs and Lows from the week
* **What are one or two things that you love about where you live? Is there anything that drives you crazy about it?**

Bible Lesson / Discussion

**Reading the Bible:**

* We have been reading through Genesis to start our year, and for the rest of the book we are going to be learning about one particular family: Abraham’s family and a promise he received from God about a new home.
* **Read the text together, either in the Bible, or the Spark Story Bible.**
  + Feel free to stop and ask questions during the reading, if helpful.
  + Afterwards, take time to explore what that passage might mean, and know there's no one *correct* way to read these passages!

**Questions About the Passage** (see next page for PreK/K questions)

* Do you think it would have been difficult for Abram to go to a new land? Have you ever moved, or known someone who moved?
* Abraham gets a promise from God that his family will someday outnumber the stars – spend a little time thinking about your family tree! What do you know about your grandparents, or other extended family? What important lessons did they teach to your family, or to you?

**Connections to Our Lives**

* God gives Abraham a series of blessings: a new place to call home, a new family, even a new name. What are some blessings in your life?
* There are many people in the world who aren’t as fortunate as we are – what are ways that we could try to be a blessing in our lives?

**Biblical/Church Connections**

* Just like last week with Noah, God makes a special promise with Abraham called a covenant – it is an unbreakable promise from God that Abraham and his family will always be loved. Do you have a promise like that in your life today? (Yes! From God, our families and our church family!)

**Alternate Preschool and K/1st Questions**

Younger ages, particularly those in our preschool class, may have a hard time discussing the biblical text for very long (if at all). My hope is that these questions (and especially the activity) can help with engagement!

**Opening Questions**

* In our Bible reading today, we hear about someone named Abraham being promised a new place to call home! What is something that you love about where you live? Is there anything that you don’t like about it?

**Fun Warm-Up Activity – Sing Father Abraham again!**

* Abraham got a promise that he’d have a very big family – and we thought it might be fun to sing “Father Abraham” again just like we did in Chapel!
* Lyrics: “Father Abraham – had many kids – many kids had Father Abraham. I am one of them – and so are you. So let’s all praise the Lord”

(Add a movement each time through and keep it moving: right arm, left arm, right foot, left foot, nod your head, turn around, sit down!)

**Reading the Bible:**

* We’re opening up the Bible to the Book of Genesis again, which is the first book in the Bible – last week, we learned about Noah – today, Abraham!
* **Read the text together, either in the Bible, or the Spark Story Bible.**

**Bible Discussion/Questions**

* The Bible talks about Abraham’s kids and his kids’ kids outnumbering the stars… how many people are in your family? What about other important people like aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc.?
* God makes a special promise with Abraham called a covenant – it is an unbreakable promise from God that Abraham and his family will always be loved. Who are people in your life who love you? (Hear kids responses, and remind them that God loves them too!)
* What are things we can do or say to show other people that we love them?

People of Faith

In addition to reading our weekly Bible story, I'd love for our older grade school students to learn more about people whose lives were changed by their faith in Jesus. We'll lift up a new person each Sunday, trying to connect their story to our Bible passage as much as possible!

**Walter Brueggemann**

The Old Testament – and in particular Genesis – can sometimes feel like a completely different world from our own, both to kids and adults. Thankfully, there have been countless scholars over the years who have helped bring it to life and deep meaning – and Walter Brueggemann is that type of scholar.

Brueggemann was born in Nebraska in 1933 and spent a great deal of time at church due to his father being a German Evangelical pastor. Shortly after graduating from college he discerned that God was calling him into the academic world, earning a doctorate in theology by the time he was 28.

For the next 42 years, Brueggemann would serve as a professor of Old Testament – first at Eden Theological Seminary, then at Columbia Theological Seminary – while also becoming one of the pre-eminent Old Testament scholars in the nation. By the time that he “retired”, Brueggemann had published over 50 books dedicated to the topic of studying the Old Testament – ranging from commentaries on individual books of the Bible, to wide-ranging texts on Old Testament theology and ways to interpret the Bible.

One of these books, *The Prophetic Imagination* (published in 1977), is often cited as a modern classic – in which Brueggemann speaks of an imagination that the ancient prophets held, and why we need that same type of imagination in the church today. “I have come to the rather simplistic notion that imagination is the capacity to image a world beyond what is obviously given”, he once said, “That’s the work of poets and novelists and artists—and that’s what biblical writers mostly do. I think that’s why people show up at church.”

Even as he approaches 90 (and has published a dozen books since he officially retired), Brueggemann has continued to push the church to be a place that resists our culture’s “materialism, prejudice, and power politics” – imagining a different and better world for all people, and working to make it so.

Crafts / Activities

**Abram’s Call Star Spotter**

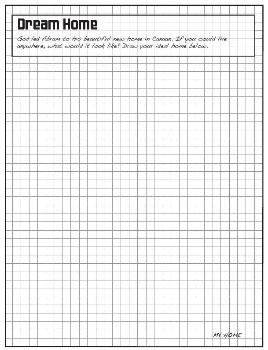
**(Ages 5+, 5-10 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Template
* Scissors/Tape
* Brads/Fasteners
* Markers/Crayons

Instructions:

* This craft might take some extra effort (namely creating the tube) but we can be reminded of Abraham’s descendants that will outnumber the stars!

**Abram’s Call Dream Home**

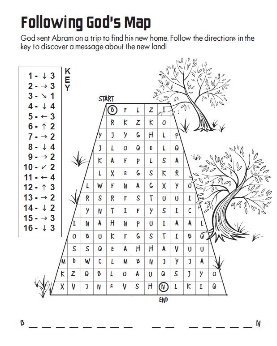
**(Ages 5+, 5 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Pen/Pencil/Crayons

Instructions:

* Abram was promised a new home by God – and you can invite kids of all ages to design and draw *their* own dream home!

**Abram’s Call Word Puzzle**

**(Ages 7+, 5 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Pen/Pencil/Crayons

Instructions:

* This word puzzle will involve kids carefully following the directions given on the left column, uncovering the phrase “Blessings in Caanan”

Biblical Background – Abram’s Call[[1]](#footnote-1)

After multiple weeks in the "prehistory" portion of the Book of Genesis (Genesis 1-11), this week we turn to God's call to Abram and a series of promises that God makes. While the early chapters of Genesis deal in the universal, from here on out Genesis becomes much more personal: focused on Abram, Abram's family, and Abram's descendants – and most importantly the ways in which God fulfills the promises that occur within the opening verses of this chapter.

The idea of covenant (first introduced last week with Noah) is central to not just the story of Abram/Abraham – but for understanding the entirety of Genesis and beyond. Covenants in the ancient world were legal promises, but the biblical text expands and develops that idea into something larger: an everlasting relationship between God and humanity through Abraham and his children. This covenant is not completely unconditional in the way that God’s covenant with Noah was – Genesis 17:9-14 make that clear – but this nonetheless represents a continued shift in God’s relationship with creation.

Some have speculated that the series of blessings that God bestows upon Abram are functionally a reversal of the ways in which humanity’s relationship with God was damaged in Genesis 1-11. For example:

* In Genesis 3, God gives curses to Adam and Eve before casting them out of Eden; in Genesis 12, God blesses Abram with the promise of land.
* In Genesis 6, God desires to "blot out from the earth the human beings I have created"; in Genesis 12, God promises to make a great nation from Abram (and later, that Abram's descendants would outnumber the stars).
* In Genesis 11, the Tower of Babel builders state "let us make a name for ourselves" before God scatters them; in Genesis 12, God promises to make Abram's name great.

Even if these blessings were not intended as a direct one-to-one reversal of God’s early punishments of humanity, the ongoing relationship between God and humanity – and many moments of familial drama between Abraham’s descendants! – will become an important theme throughout the biblical text.

1. Your ability to share this info with kids will vary depending on their age – this section is mainly written for teachers and parents to learn a bit more about the background to each week's passage! [↑](#footnote-ref-1)