



Weaving God's Promises

LESSON 4 **ABRAHAM, SARAH AND THEIR ADVENTURES WITH GOD**

SUMMARY OF TODAY'S STORY

Abraham and Sarah are called by God to a new land, which God promises to them and their descendants. God also promises Abraham and Sarah that they will have descendants that will number as many as the stars in the sky.

Although Abraham and Sarah are very old, Sarah gives birth to a boy, whom they name Isaac. When Isaac is still a boy, God tests Abraham and Sarah's trust in God by asking Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. God finds Abraham's faith to be firm and renews the promise made to Abraham and Sarah.

KEY CONCEPTS

- Faith
- Trust
- Promise

WHERE YOU'LL FIND TODAY'S STORY

In the Bible

We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

Genesis 12:1-8 (God calls Abraham and Sarah)

Genesis 15 (God's promise to Abraham)

Genesis 21 and 22 (Isaac)

In Our Sunday Lectionary

Today's story is told in church at these times:

Year A:

Second Sunday in Lent

Maundy Thursday

Great Vigil of Easter



WEAVING OUR STORY WITH THE BIBLICAL STORY

Today's story is the story of how God chooses Abraham and Sarah to be the parents of "many nations," making them the parents of God's chosen people. This is the beginning of our "becoming God's people."

The story of Abraham and Sarah is the first story in this year's theme: Once we were no people, but now we are God's people. This story has several parts:

- God calls Abraham and Sarah to a new land (Genesis 12:1-8).
- God promises Abraham and Sarah "progeny as numerous as the stars" and makes a covenant with him (Genesis 15).
- Isaac is born (Genesis 21:1-7).
- Abraham, trusting God, almost sacrifices Isaac and receives a second blessing (Genesis 22:1-19).

Abraham is the father of Isaac, who is the father of Jacob, who is the father of Joseph. Joseph ends up in Egypt, having been sold as a slave by his own brothers (this story will be covered next year). Joseph's father Jacob and Joseph's eleven brothers—who, with Joseph, become the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel—follow Joseph to Egypt during a seven-year famine in Palestine.

The next story begins in Egypt as the Israelites become numerous in population, and the Egyptians become afraid of their growing numbers and enslave them.

Before Abraham and Sarah, all the stories were about people in general: Once we were no people. We can see how they are fallen, sinful, arrogant, lost.

In today's story, God chooses one couple and their descendants—us—to be God's people. We give thanks to God for adopting us. Later, through Jesus Christ, God helps us become God's children. We are the children of God. What a grace!

THE EPISCOPAL THREAD

The story of the *Akedah*—as the sacrifice of Isaac is called in Judaism—is told on Maundy Thursday and in Lent because we, as Christians, make a connection between Isaac's near-sacrifice and Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for us.

God did not make Abraham go through with the sacrifice of his only son—but then God did let Jesus, God's only Son, be sacrificed.

In his letters, Paul makes many references to Abraham, whom "God reckoned as righteous." Abraham's faith in God—faithfully obeying God without question—gave the Jewish people a special relationship with God. As Christians, we rejoice in that glorious heritage, a heritage we share as part of the Judeo-Christian tradition.





GATHERING

Check-In

Invite group members to sit comfortably, giving them an opportunity to visit with each other, establish friendships and build community. Relationships are an important dimension of Christian formation, so a few minutes of visiting will enrich their spiritual development. This is also the perfect time to “check in” with your group members by asking them to share how they are feeling at the time or what kind of a week they had.



PRAYER

Materials:

- small table with cloth to cover it
- large pillar candle or large Christ candle
- matches
- cross

After all group members have had a few minutes of fellowship time, gather them together for a simple opening prayer. Ask one of the members to light a pillar candle while saying these words from Psalm 119:105:

- Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Explain that you are inviting the light of God to be with all of you. (You might consider posting this verse from Psalm 119 in the meeting room).

Invite the member who lit the candle to read a brief prayer, such as Psalm 28:7:

- The Lord is my strength and my shield;
In him my heart trusts;
So I am helped, and my heart exults,
And with my song I give thanks to him. *Amen.*

Carefully extinguish the candle.



TELLING THE STORY

Set the Scene:

Ask group members to think about the person they care most about (other than themselves). Discuss:

- What if you had to abandon or never see that person again?
- How would you feel?

Read today’s story from a Bible or tell the story in your own words. As you can see, there are really three stories this week, but they are all part of the story of God’s choosing Abraham and Sarah to be the first of God’s chosen people. This is a good story for entering the minds and hearts of Abraham and Sarah—imagining their feelings of turmoil, fear and trepidation—as they faced the unknown and still trusted in God. Capture these feelings in your storytelling.

This is also a good story for roleplaying, with one participant playing *Abraham*, another *Sarah* and a third *God*.

You’ll find suggestions for ways to dramatize a story along with other ideas for bringing the story to life for the children on pages 2-3 under Storytelling Enhancements in the Appendix, also found on the website.

Let the group hear the story without analyzing it for them or asking them to explore its meaning. For now, we just want them to absorb the story in their heads and hearts and to remember its power. Later, use the discussion or arts time to help the group members draw appropriate and meaningful connections between the story and their own lives.



WEAVING OUR FAITH

Lesson Box

Materials:

- 1 3" x 5" index card for the day's scribe
- pen or pencil
- file box in which to store the cards

Ask for a volunteer or assign a group member to act as scribe. Then, ask the group to articulate the most important lesson gleaned from the day's reading. As prompts, you might ask:

- Have you ever faced a crisis of faith?
- How does it feel to trust God?
- What is God's promise to us?

Once the group has agreed on its wording, ask the scribe to write the lesson on the card, date it and file it in the box. By the end of the year, you will have a wonderful and thorough summation of the lessons covered in participants' own words.



CLOSING PRAYER

Before the group leaves, say a closing prayer to send them into the church worship service or back to their homes with God's love and blessing. The prayer can be very simple, such as this one (Psalm 34:1, 4 and 8):

- I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall always be on my lips.
I sought the Lord, and he answered me,
And delivered me from all my fears.
O taste and see that the Lord is good
Happy are those who trust in Him. *Amen*

End the lesson with a dismissal that is used in church, such as:

- The peace of the Lord be always with you.

The youth respond:

- And also with you.

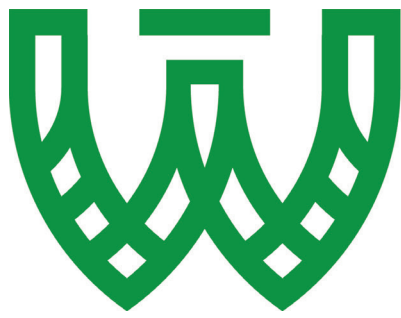


Weaving God's Beloved Community

It isn't always easy following God's call in your life. God asked a lot of Abraham and Sarah. They had to put a lot of trust in God, even when they did not understand how God's promises would happen.

We cannot always understand how things happen in our world. Our role is to continue to live out God's love in the world, to help promote justice and trust and compassion and mercy to all of God's people.

- What are some examples of people trusting that there is a better opportunity for them?
- How can we share compassion with those looking for God's promise in their lives?



Weaving God's Promises

A TEST OF FAITH: THE MOVIE

Group members will write a movie trailer or create an advertising poster for the movie “A Test of Faith—The Story of Abraham and Sarah’s Adventures with God”

Materials:

- note paper
- pens or pencils
- poster board
- colored pencils, markers, or paints and brushes
- if available, computer with clip art

Preparation:

Call attention to all of the difficult, frightening and sometimes exciting events that occurred in Abraham and Sarah’s life as told in the day’s lesson.

Take a few minutes to list them along with some strong adjectives on a large sheet of paper. These will serve as reminders for the following activity.

Directions:

1. Tell the group members to imagine that the story they just heard was being made into a blockbuster movie. Working individually or in pairs, they will either write and narrate a 30-60 second trailer script or design and draw a poster to advertise the movie.
2. Explain that the purpose of each is to draw the public’s attention to the movie by piquing their interest but without giving away important events.
3. If possible, play a few trailers of current films (go to www.imbd.com for free trailers).

Close:

- Participants who write trailers may read them to the group or record and play them instead.
- Hang the posters in the meeting space.

Note: This activity may take more than one session.



Weaving God's Promises

NOURISHING THE BODY AND THE SOUL

Invite the group to work together to make and enjoy food and drink like those Abraham and his family might have eaten. While the group is enjoying the snacks, take some time to discuss the highlights of Abraham's adventures. What did they think about the tests he endured?

Note: *Specific ingredients are listed with each snack. Depending upon which snacks you choose to make, you'll also need:*

- cookie sheet
- measuring spoons and cups
- knife and fork
- pot
- eggbeater
- bowls and mixing spoons

Bread Snack

thawed frozen bread dough
cinnamon and sugar mixture

Directions:

1. Cut small lumps of bread dough and roll in cinnamon sugar.
2. Place on a cookie sheet and let rise for 15-20 minutes.
2. Bake at 400° for 10-15 minutes.

Flatbread

- 2 cups flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon baking powder
- 4 tablespoons shortening
- ¾ cup milk

Directions:

1. Mix dry ingredients.
2. Blend in shortening with a fork until crumbly.
3. Add milk.
4. Pat into rounds about 4" in diameter and ½" thick.
5. Bake at 450° for 12-15 minutes on ungreased cookie sheet.
6. Spread with honey butter.

Honey Butter

- 1 cup honey
- 1 cup softened butter

Directions:

1. Mix honey and butter together thoroughly.
2. Spread on warm flatbread.

Stuffed Pita Bread

- pita bread, cut into quarters to make triangles
- softened cream cheese
- chopped olives

Directions:

1. Spread cream cheese inside the pita bread triangles.
2. Sprinkle olives on the cream cheese.

Eggnog (made ahead)

6 large pasteurized eggs

¼ cup sugar

optional: ¼ teaspoon salt

1 quart whole milk

1 teaspoon vanilla

optional: nutmeg

Directions:

1. In large saucepan, beat together eggs, sugar and salt, if used.
2. Stir in 2 cups milk.
3. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, until mixture is thick enough to coat a metal spoon with a thin film and reaches at least 160°.
4. Remove from heat.
5. Stir in remaining 2 cups milk and vanilla.
6. Cover and refrigerate until thoroughly chilled, several hours or overnight.
7. Just before serving, pour into pitcher.
8. Sprinkle nutmeg on top.
9. Serve immediately.

Note: Other drink options include pomegranate juice or mint tea.



Weaving God's Promises

OUR OWN FAITH JOURNEYS: A LESSON IN TRUST

Group members participate in a series of activities designed to help build trust in one another.

Materials:

blindfolds

“natural” obstacles, such as branches, stones, steps, trees, etc.

Preparation:

Before the lesson begins (and preferably with a helper or two), scope out two or three “faith journey” routes outdoors. They need not be formally marked, but the path each pair of participants will take needs to be located a short distance from the others. Make sure that each path includes some obstacles (branches, doors, trees, cars, etc.).

Directions:

- Depending on time, you may only be able to complete 1 or 2 of the following activities.

“I’m Right Behind You”

Place members who are similar in size and strength in groups of three or four. Each participant will cross arms over chest, and will, after counting to three, fall back into the arms of the group behind them. No one should be forced to take part in this activity.

“I’ve Got Your Back”

Pair up group members who are similar in height and size. Tell them to sit on the floor, back to back, knees bent, feet flat on the floor. Pairs will link arms and, without touching the floor with their hands, work themselves up to a standing position. This may take a few tries and some discussion with each pair.

“Follow Me”

This activity is best done outside in good weather. Divide the group into pairs. Lead each pair to its path and explain that, to get from start to finish on the route, one member will be blindfolded; the other will be their guide along the short journey. Guides must give brief but clear instructions (take 5 steps forward; stop; go up two stairs; etc.) until the traveler has made it to the end of the path.

Close:

- Once the activities have been completed, gather the entire group together for a short talk about their experiences. Some questions you might ask are:
 - How did it feel to be the guide?
 - How did it feel to be blindfolded?
 - Was it difficult to trust the others? Why or why not?



Weaving God's Promises

ORIGAMI STARS

Participants make origami stars, a reminder of God's promise to Abraham that he will have descendants "as numerous as the stars."

Materials:

- 10" square sheets of origami paper, in a variety of colors
- scissors
- string or yarn
- copies of the "Origami Star Instructions" (p. 13.), 1 per group member

Preparation:

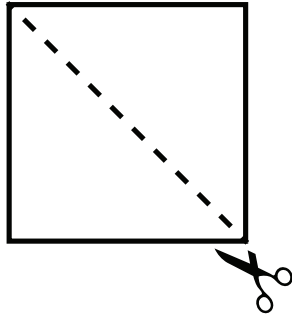
Make copies of the "Origami Star Instructions" (p. 13), one sheet for each group member.

Or, if you wish, go to www.origami-fun.com or www.en.origami-club.com for origami how-to videos.

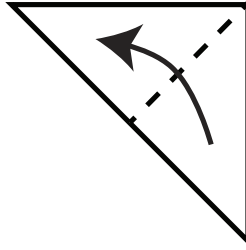
Directions:

1. Distribute copies of the "Origami Star Instructions."
2. Invite each group member to select one or more sheets of origami paper and to follow the instructions to create one or more stars.
3. Hang the stars from thread or fishing line in the meeting space.

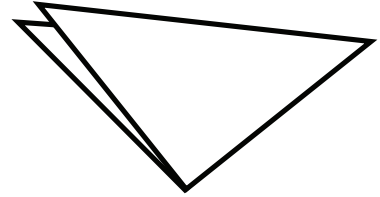
Origami Star Instructions



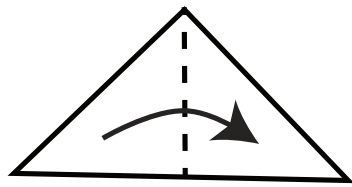
1. Start with a square piece of paper. Cut in half diagonally.



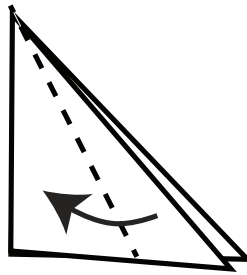
2. Fold in half.



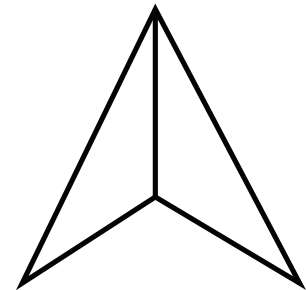
3. This is "part one." Set aside..



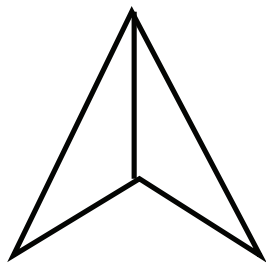
4. Fold the remaining piece of paper in half.



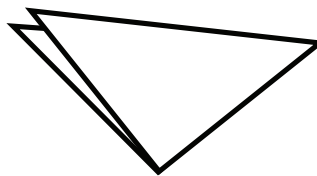
5. Fold each side in half outward.



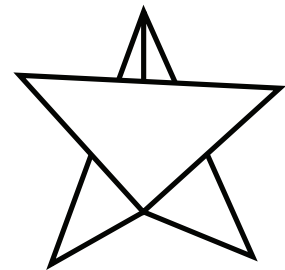
6. This is "part two."



Part Two



Part One



Finished star.



Weaving God's Promises

THE CHALLENGES OF FAITH AND TRUST

Participants work together to write one or more illustrated articles about faith and trust for the church newsletter, website, or social media.

Preparation:

Prepare and post an outline of the events in the story of Abraham and Sarah, including:

- their call to a new land
- the promise of numerous descendants
- the birth of Isaac
- the call to sacrifice Isaac

Materials:

note pads for writing and illustrating
pens and pencils
fine-point markers, black or dark blue

Directions:

1. Divide the youth into two groups: writers and artists. Depending on the size of the group, you may have multiple groups of writers and artists.
2. Explain to the authors that they will be writing an article about faith and trust. They may first choose to summarize Abraham's adventures, and then follow with accounts of their own stories of having faith and developing trust in God.
3. Ask the artists to depict each of the parts of Abraham's story with original drawings. If time permits, they may also draw pictures that illustrate their own tests of faith and trust.

Close:

Submit the articles and drawings to the church secretary or communications person for printing in the monthly newsletter. Or, scan the pictures and save to the computer so that articles and pictures may be included in a page on the church's own website. Make sure to include by-lines for the authors and credit for the artists.