

Growing in God's Love

A Story Bible Curriculum

Abraham and Sarah's Big Family



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Abraham and Sarah's Big Family

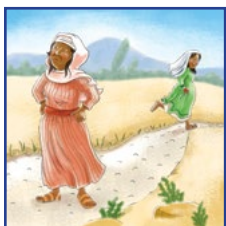
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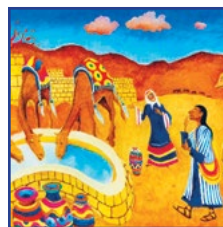
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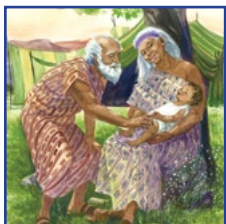
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The free At-Home Kit Guide provides instructions and suggestions for at-home faith formation. Download it at www.pcusastore.com/StoryBibleCurriculum or www.thethoughtfulchristian.com/StoryBibleCurriculum. Click on the unit title, and then click on the download button found at the bottom of the product page for this unit.

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🌱 **Goal:** To reconize that God can surprise us.

Connecting with the Biblical Text

Abraham and Sarah have waited a long time for God's promise of a nation. Still, the announcement that Sarah would have a baby in her old age was so absurd that Sarah laughed out loud. But it happened. God kept the promise to make them parents of a great nation. Well, this was the first step along the way. Other women who longed for a baby had similar experiences: Hannah, the mother of Samuel (1 Samuel 1:11–20) and Elizabeth, the mother of John the baptized (Luke 1:5–19). God's way of keeping the covenant is often unexpected, but with God nothing is impossible.

For more about this humorous announcement for Sarah, see bit.ly/SarahCommentary.

Connecting with the World

Was any baby more anticipated than Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah? For so many years, they had waited for God to fulfill the promise that they would have a family. Unfortunately, not every child enters this world with parents eager to care for her or him. And many children are born into poverty or countries at war, where parents filled with love face additional barriers to caring adequately for their children.

- 🌱 To read a simple statement of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children, go to bit.ly/RightsOfTheChild.
- 🌱 What help is available to parents who lack the resources to care for their children in your community?
- 🌱 What are the needs of foster parents or emergency caregivers in your congregation?
- 🌱 How might you or your congregation advocate for children in your community or state?

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

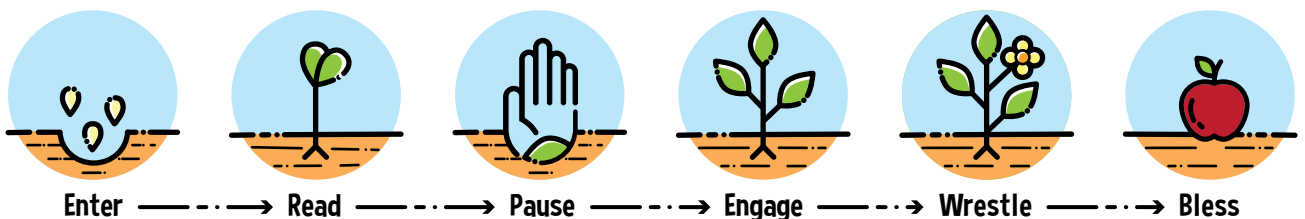
Knowing they are loved by the adults in their lives whom they see regularly provides a basis for children to imagine how God loves them. Building that love depends on words as well as actions. The loving actions of adults around them give meaning to the words children hear. However, without the words, the actions may be misinterpreted or misunderstood. A lovely way to remember to say those important words that express love, whether you are a teacher, parent, or caregiver, is to bless children daily. When a child and their parent or caregiver separate for the day, it is a good time to bless the child, which serves as a reminder of the love the parent or caregiver and God have for this child: "God loves you and so do I." Words of love reinforced by acts of love cannot be spoken too often.

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

Children are not the only ones who need to know they are loved by others and by God. Adults do too. The spiritual health of adults depends on this love.

- 🌱 How do you know that you are loved? What confirms that love for you?
- 🌱 The image we have of God is tantamount to our relationship with God. If we view God as a judge over us, we may never feel that we meet God's expectations. If we know a forgiving God, we are more willing to risk failure. What is your image of God, and how does it reinforce your awareness of God's love?
- 🌱 To ponder the connection between God's love and your love for others, read 1 John 4:16b–21. How do you imagine this connection in your relationships?

God of love, as we ponder the fullness of your perfect love, may we live in your love so that we show that love to those in our family and the world. Amen.



Enter — — — —> Read — — — —> Pause — — — —> Engage — — — —> Wrestle — — — —> Bless

Leading

Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✓ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✓ Cloth napkins and tablecloth(s)
- ✓ Place setting for each child: plate, silverware, glass
- ✓ Centerpiece(s)
- ✓ Copies of Resource Page 1
- ✓ Sparkling apple or grape juice, water
- ✓ Food for three courses
- ✓ Index card to use for removing crumbs
- ✓ "After dinner" mints
- ✓ Internet-connected device

Preparing to Lead

This story from Genesis 18 and 21 has layers. There is more going on in it than first meets the eye. It has complexity, and that is often tricky to introduce to children. Partner with the children to open a door they can access and walk through to explore the intricacies on their own terms.

Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible invites children into this story by focusing on Sarah's laugh. Read Genesis 18:1–15 and 21:1–7. Look for these other themes that occur in the story:

- ✓ welcoming strangers with extravagant hospitality
- ✓ making food for a special occasion

In a way, Abraham's invitation to the travelers in the story is our call, too, as we lead the children in our care. May we provide them with rest and spiritual nourishment on their journey of faith.

This session takes place entirely around a table set for a feast. You'll be modeling Abraham's extravagant welcome from the story and, as the courses are served, exploring the Bible story *God Made Sarah Laugh*. Set up table and chairs in the center of your meeting space as if it were a dining table with a tablecloth, plates, silverware, glasses, napkins, and centerpieces. Go all out! Pretend you are hosting a fancy dinner party in your home.

The setup of this meal is not as important as how you model hospitality and welcome the children extravagantly. This will work even if you use paper products; a simple meal of carrot sticks, cheese and crackers, and cookies; and water.



Enter into sacred space together.

As the children enter, greet them with a glass of sparkling juice or water. When all the children have arrived, invite them to be seated around the table. Welcome them by telling them that you'll be exploring a Bible story while sharing a special meal. Pray:

Gracious God, thank you for these friends and the table we're gathered around. Bless this food and those that prepared it. Help us to remember those who don't get to eat like this every day. Amen.

Invite the children to put their napkins on their laps and start a conversation about table manners the children may know. Tell them that having good manners at the table is part of saying thank you to the person who has welcomed you to eat at their table.

For children who might have difficulty sitting still at a table for so long, invite them to get up and shake their wiggles out between courses.

Ask the children what a covenant is. Tell them, if necessary, that it is a promise between two or more parties. Make a covenant with the children. Tell them you will promise that there will be a dessert treat at the end of the meal. Ask the children if they will promise to use good manners at the table.



Read a story of God's people.

Do your best waiter impression and serve the first course to the children. Make a little bit of a show, the way a good host does, of seeing to the children's needs. Once everyone has been served and has everything they need, read them "God Made Sarah Laugh" (p. 50) while they eat.

Invite older children to act as waiters to help you serve each course. Encourage them to act the part, taking care of the needs of those they are serving. Have the waiters sit after they have served the others. Serve them.

Leading

Ask the children to describe all the ways Abraham goes out of his way to show his guests hospitality. Use the following list if they need suggestions:

- ✔ Abraham runs to meet the visitors and hurries to prepare a meal.
- ✔ He provides water to wash their feet.
- ✔ He tells Sarah to use the best flour.
- ✔ He has a servant prepare the best calf.
- ✔ He serves milk and butter.

As the children finish their first course, ask them what makes them feel welcome in someone else's house and what they do to make others feel welcome in their homes.



Pause to let God's Word enter into hearts and minds.

Clear away, or have your “waiters” help clear, the first course. Make a little fuss of using an index card to remove the crumbs from the tablecloth like they do in fancy restaurants. Then invite the children to pause for a moment of quiet and pay attention to their bodies. Ask the following questions, pausing after each to let the question sit with the children for a few moments:

- ✔ How does it feel to be welcomed so extravagantly?
- ✔ How does it feel to have good food in your bellies?
- ✔ How would it have felt to be Abraham's guest?

After a little silence, invite the children to share their thoughts.



Engage curiosity and imagination with God's story.

Serve the second course to the children. When everyone has been served, tell the children that one way a host knows a dinner party is going well is when there is laughter around the table. It means people are enjoying themselves.

Ask the children what makes them laugh. Invite a joke or two. Suggest that sometimes what makes people laugh is when something ridiculous or unexpected happens. Invite suggestions of the ridiculous or unexpected. Have an example or two to share if necessary.

Read the last part of the story from “Sarah was about to poke her head out . . .” to the end. Ask the children what they think made Sarah laugh and why this made her laugh. Make the connection to Sarah's laughter and the unexpected. Sarah did not expect God to promise that she would have a child. She thought it was ridiculously funny that her old body could have a baby!

Clear away the second course. Don't forget to remove crumbs from the table again!



Wrestle with our place in God's story.

Ask the children what the covenant was that you made with them at the beginning of the meal. Remind them, if necessary, that you promised dessert treats, and they promised to have good table manners. Wonder together how they kept their part of the covenant and showed good manners. Keep your part of the covenant and serve dessert.

While they eat their desert, ask the children:

- ✔ How does it feel to be so well taken care of at the table?
- ✔ How does it feel to have kept the covenant and get to eat a treat?
- ✔ How do you think Sarah and Abraham felt after a long life of waiting for God to bless them with a baby?
- ✔ What are some ways that you see God keeping promises in unexpected ways that make you laugh?



Bless one another with God's grace.

Clear the last course from the table and give each child an after-dinner mint. Before they unwrap it and eat it, have them repeat this closing blessing:

This candy tastes sweet. /
May I be just as sweet /
to my family, friends, and neighbors. /
May I welcome them sweetly /
with God's help. /
This mint tastes fresh. /
May I make fresh promises /
to God every day. /

Leading

May I find joy /
in welcoming God /
to my table. /
Amen. /



Grow with more.

○ Naming

- ✦ Tell the children that in the Bible, and in many cultures, people are given names that have particular meaning for them, their family, or their community. God changed Abram's name, which means "special ancestor" to Abraham, which means "father of many." That name change signified something that happened to Abram. In this story, we learn that Sarah is surprised by God's unexpected blessing of a baby, and so she laughed. It's no surprise that the baby is named Isaac, which means "laughter!"
- ✦ Ask the children if any know the meaning of their name and why it was given to them. Provide craft supplies and invite the children to make a sign with their name and its meaning. Use an internet search to find the meaning of names entering "meaning of the name (*Name*)" for each child. Invite the children to imagine how the meaning of their name might describe them, now or in the future. Wonder together what unexpected surprises their name might

indicate. Perhaps a Daisy, which comes from "day's eye," sees the good in each day; a Manuel, which comes from Immanuel, meaning "God with us" notices God moments; or a Brittany, which means "from Britain," pays attention to people who are from a different country. Help the children think creatively.

○ Surprise Names

- ✦ Invite the children to make a surprise name using their name. Hand out sheets of white paper and use the following directions to make a mirrored name.
 - Fold your paper in half lengthwise and then open it.
 - Write your name with a crayon in large letters, cursive or print, along the fold with the bottom of each letter touching the fold line.
 - Close the paper again and use hard object, such as a coin, to rub over the lines you made and transfer them to the other side of the fold.
 - Open the paper and darken the transferred lines with a crayon.
 - Color in the different spaces that the letters make. Include pictures of things that you like or that tell about you in the spaces or around the outside of the letters.
- ✦ When the children have finished their pictures, have them share their pictures with the group, inviting the other children to see what surprises they can find in the picture.

God Made Sarah Laugh
Resource Page 1

