

Gen. 12:1–4a

Ps. 121

Rom. 4:1–5, 13–17

John 3:1–17 or

Matthew 17:1–9

Promise of Presence and Blessing

Goal for the Session

After hearing Abram’s call from God, youth will consider God’s surprising call and leadership in their lives.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Genesis 12:1–4a

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by Carol A. Newsom

(vv. 2–3). If the command underscores what Abram puts at risk, the blessing reassures him that God will provide abundantly. The key term in this section is “bless/blessing” (five occurrences). In Hebrew, blessing signifies flourishing. It includes physical vigor, fertility, security, and success in one’s undertakings (e.g., Ps. 128). Although this is the key term, it is significant that the opening words are not “I will bless you” but, rather, “I will make of you a great nation.” The emphasis is not on Abram the individual but on the future Israel. The term “nation” (Heb. *goy*) is not a kinship term but a word that designates a political entity. The nation will be the result of God’s blessing Abram, and the nation is the means by which Abram’s name will be “made great.”

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Frederick Neidner

All views of blessing hang on a single theological premise: God chooses to remain intimately connected to the creation and particularly to the flesh and blood that became human when God mixed dust with God’s own breath. God may grieve and even rant over the incessant evil that humankind dreams up in every generation, but given the nature of God’s commitment, God will not or perhaps cannot give up the creatures that share the divine breath. Inevitably, such faithfulness on God’s part means that God will suffer all the pain and sorrow that this troubled relationship generates. From the vantage point of Golgotha, the question was never whether, but only when, that faithfulness would finally cost God life itself.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Donald P. Olsen

Our own experience and the witness of Scripture concur that the one who calls is the one who equips. The one who equips always leads the called to more complete expression of the persons they were created to be. Consequently, if the call is of God, the answer to all the above questions is yes. A faithful response is the embrace of what God has already called into being—a newness of being—and the release from what is known for what is promised. A faithful response is neither forced nor coerced, but a step freely taken toward our true selves.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by James Mctyre

The other facet of Abram’s mirror is the side that reflects God to all the nations. From this half of the visual image comes the church’s mandate to mission and evangelism. The church must be more than analyst and commentator, more even than encourager or discourager. Beyond its social and personal purposes is the church’s divine calling. Abram is a blessing, not because of his own skill, but because he will be used to purely reflect God’s light. The church is called to be a blessing to the nations, not because it is faultless, but because it reflects the One who is.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Genesis 12:1–4a

Focus on Your Teaching

Teenagers face many choices and decisions with uncertainty of the outcomes. Some of them are naturally risk-takers. Although they may have unrealistic expectations, they will see exciting opportunities in something new and be willing to try it out. Others are more naturally cautious, needing more certainty in their lives before committing themselves. The possibility and unpredictability of change may keep them from taking risks. One gift they can receive from their faith community is the affirmation of God’s presence and blessing as they journey through life and into an unknown future.

God, help me to convey a sense of your loving, constant presence to the youth and encourage them to respond to your call in their lives. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- newsprint and marker
- sticky notes
- pencils
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- small pieces of paper
- candle, matches

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2, pens or pencils
- option 2: card stock, magazines, glue sticks, markers, art supplies

For Film Connection

- Internet-connected device

As a result of their covenant with God, Abram’s name was changed to Abraham (which means “father of many nations” and Sarai to Sarah (which means “princess”).

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, draw the shape of a large planet on newsprint. On one side of the planet, print: Okay, let’s go! and on the other side, I’ll pass on that. For Responding option 3, invite several older members of the congregation to tell some of their life story to the group. Invite them to consider their responses to the questions in that option as they prepare.

Greet youth as they arrive and give each one six sticky notes and a pencil. Tell the group that they have been selected to begin a new settlement on Mars. Ask group members to write pros and cons about this adventure, one per sticky note. As they finish, have them place their notes under the appropriate heading. Review their notes and discuss how there would be exciting opportunities as well as challenges in responding to this call. Explain that in today’s Bible story a family leaves their home to follow God’s call into a unknown future.

Pray:

God, thank you for your presence during this Lenten season. Help us to be open as you call us in our study of your Word. Amen.

EXPLORING

Introduce the book of Genesis, which is the story of God’s people beginning with God’s call to Abram and his wife Sarai. Most of Genesis is about God’s promises to Abram and Sarai, and their adventures as they travel to a new land, as well as the story of their descendants: Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel and Leah, and Joseph and his brothers. It is a story of God’s call and of an agreement, or covenant, that Abram and Sarai made with God that involved making hard choices.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (You Want Us to Do What?) and ask for volunteers to read the parts. Read the dramatized story together and ask for their initial responses to the story. Ask:

- ✧ If Abram and Sarai were making a list of pros and cons, what do you think they would put on those two lists?
- ✧ What are some of the things they would have to leave behind?
- ✧ What do you think would have helped them as they stepped out into an unknown future?

Distribute Bibles. Ask a volunteer to read Genesis 12:1–4a. Explain that in the culture of that time, having no children was thought to be a sign that the couple was out of favor with God. No explanation is given for why God chose Abram and Sarai, a childless old couple, to receive the surprising promise that they would have descendants. Ask:

- ✧ What questions do you think Abram and Sarai asked, or wanted to ask, God about this promise?

If youth have access to maps in their Bibles, ask them to find one that charts the probable course of Abraham's journey from Ur to Canaan.

The time it took Abram and Sarai to travel all the way to Canaan isn't known, but the next eight chapters of Genesis record many adventures along the way. Ask:

- ✧ In what situations today might people leave a familiar place for an unknown future elsewhere?

If your congregation or community was involved in welcoming refugees from another country in the past few years, discuss together what the refugees would have left behind, and what it might be like to start over in a new place.

To transition to the Responding options, invite the group to name times when they felt the call to step out into an unfamiliar or unknown future. Ask:

- ✧ How might knowing that God is with you help as you make these choices and decisions?

RESPONDING

Choose one of the following learning activities:

1. **Making Choices** Youth will name and explore some choices or decisions facing them in following God's call. Remind the group that during the season of Lent people often pause to meditate and "figure things out." Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Figuring Things Out) and pens. Invite youth to find a quiet space to think about or meditate on where God might be leading them. Ask them to "doodle" some responses to the questions within each shape. Afterwards some youth might like to talk about their responses with the rest of the group.

**EASY
PREP**

2. Vision Board Youth will create a “vision board” of their goals as a reminder that with God’s presence and blessings they can achieve their goals. Provide card stock, magazines, and art supplies for youth to create collages of things that inspire them, places they want to explore, positive words and sayings, educational and career goals, and spiritual goals. Encourage them to write a phrase on their collages to remind them of the promise of God’s presence and blessing and to keep their vision boards at home where they will see them, adding images and words during the season of Lent.

Option: Consider inviting one or two parents to bring supplies for making pancakes or other breakfast foods for the group to eat with their guests.

3. Guest Interviews Youth will learn from others in the congregation about responding to God’s call and trusting in God’s presence. Introduce the guests and have each young person introduce him- or herself. Then invite youth to “interview” the guests about their life journeys. Possible questions are: What are some things that changed your life? How has your faith influenced the decisions you made? What important advice would you give to young people today?

CLOSING

Distribute pieces of paper and pens. Invite group members to write their names and a word or draw a symbol that describes a choice they might make that could lead to a new life adventure. (For example, choosing to try out for an improv team or learning to play a new instrument.) Place the papers in a pile in the middle of the group and mix them up. Light a candle and spend a few moments in silence.

Have youth offer blessings to one another by taking a paper from the pile and saying:
(Name), go for it! And remember to trust in God’s presence and blessing.

Encourage youth to keep these papers and offer prayers for that person during the coming week.

■ ENHANCEMENT

FILM CONNECTION

The movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* follows the adventures of an archaeologist searching for the Holy Grail (the cup Jesus used at the Last Supper). To get to the place where the cup is, Indy has to cross a deep gorge with no visible bridge, making a “leap of faith.” Watch the scene on YouTube (bit.ly/IJLeapOffFaith) and discuss:

- ✪ What might have motivated Indy to start searching for the cup?
- ✪ What questions might he be asking himself as he tries to decide whether or not to risk stepping off the cliff?
- ✪ What would help you to “step out in faith”?

You Want Us to Do What?

(based on Genesis 11 and 12)

N **Narrator:** Once upon a time, a long ago biblical time, there was a guy named Abram. He and his wife Sarai lived with their many relatives in the city of Ur on the Persian Gulf. They had a pretty good life, lots of servants, animals, nieces and nephews...but sadly, they didn't have any children. One day Abram's father Terah announced:

T **Terah:** We're all going to move to Canaan.

A **Abram:** You want us to do what? That's incredibly far away! It will take months!

N **Narrator:** But Terah was determined. He felt that God was calling him to move to a new land, so off they went. But when they reached the city of Haran, they stopped, staying there many years. One day after Terah died, Abram heard a voice.

G **God:** Hey, Abram! I want you to leave this city. Take your wife Sarai and your relatives, and go to a new land that I will show you.

A **Abram:** You want us to do what? We're settled here now! I'm 75 years old. This is hardly the time to be heading out on a long journey, especially to some unknown place.

G **God:** If you do this, I promise that I will bless you. You'll become famous! And your descendants will become a great nation.

S **Sarai:** It will be hard to let go of our life here for sure. And there will probably be great risks, but if God is calling us to go, I think we should go!

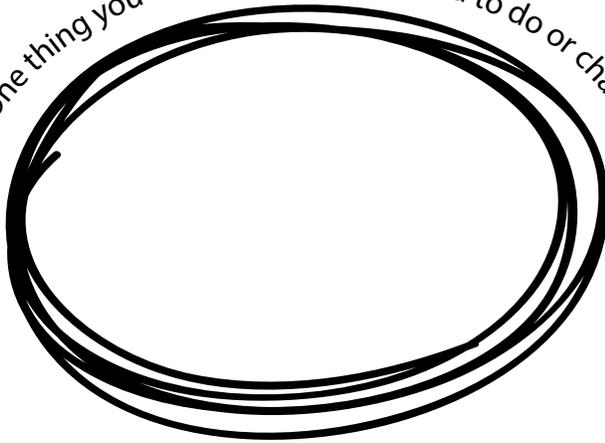
A **Abram:** I guess you're right. Though why God is calling us is a mystery. We don't have any children or descendants. But I trust God, so let's go!

N **Narrator:** So Abram and Sarai gathered all their possessions and set out on a 600-mile journey that ended in the land of Canaan near the Mediterranean Sea.

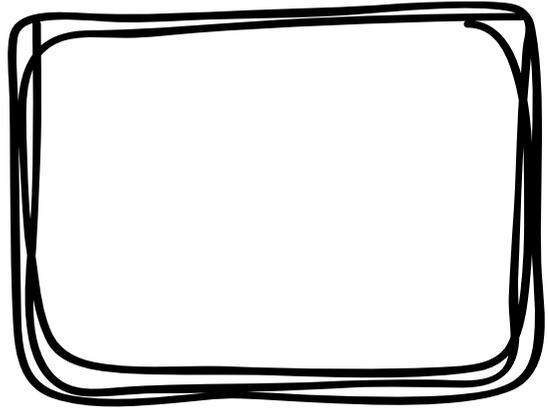
Figuring Things Out

When faced with choices and decisions it is sometimes hard to figure out what to do, let alone figure out what God has in mind! Thinking about the questions below can help you figure things out. Doodle your responses in each shape.

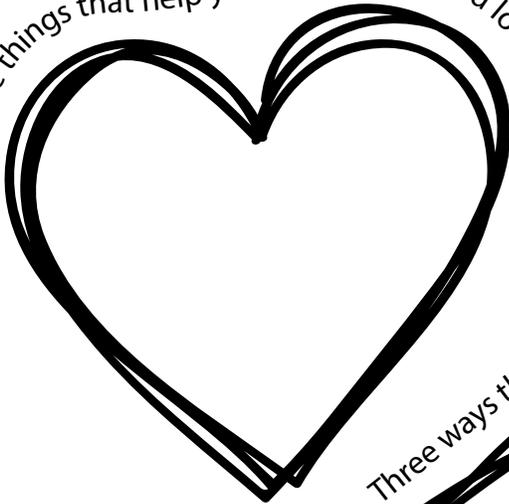
One thing you think God is calling you to do or change



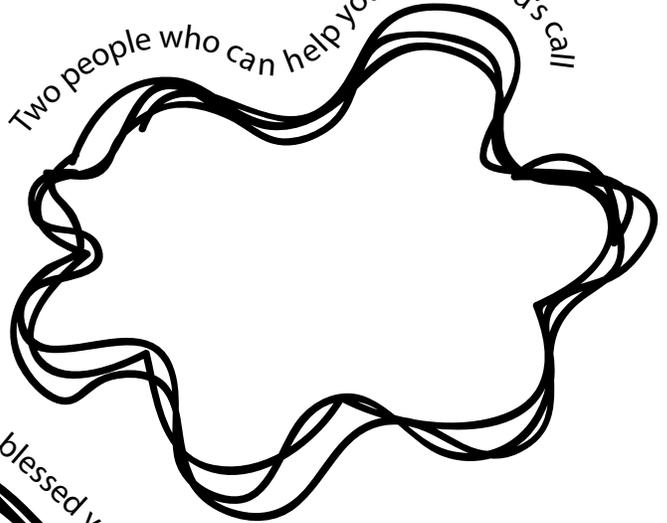
One thing that might make it hard to follow God's call



Three things that help you believe that God loves you



Two people who can help you follow God's call



Three ways that God has blessed you

