



THE CALL OF ABRAM

Daily Bible Readings

M	Aug. 29	Heb. 11: 8–19	The Faith of Abraham
T	Aug. 30	Ps. 84	How Lovely Is Your Dwelling Place!
W	Aug. 31	Rom. 4:1–12	God Reckons Righteousness Apart from Works
Th	Sept. 1	Rom. 4:13–25	A Promised Inheritance
F	Sept. 2	John 8:51–59	Abraham Rejoices in Christ
Sa	Sept. 3	Gen. 11:27–32	First Steps of Faith

MAIN IDEA

How do we respond when circumstances and expectations conflict? Abram put his confidence in God, and God reassured him.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Genesis 12:1–7; 15:1–7

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. (Gen. 12:7)

PREPARING TO LEAD

- Pray for participants and for yourself as leader. Reflect on lesson 1, “The Call of Abram” (Participant’s Book, p. 1).
- Familiarize yourself with the context of the Scripture.
- If possible, in advance of this lesson, contact potential participants and ask them to bring a notebook or tablet for journaling (either paper or electronic).
- Provide Bibles, Participant’s Books, Worship Leaflets for lesson 1, name tags, paper, and pens.
- Obtain a white pillar candle to serve as the Christ candle, as well as a means to light it.
- Step 6 offers additional options from which to choose.

LEADING THE LESSON

Opening Worship

1. Gathering

- Greet participants and provide name tags. Form pairs and ask partners to discuss a time when they had to step out into the unknown, either literally, as in undertaking a move or a journey, or figuratively, as they faced a decision with an unknown outcome. In the full group, ask pairs to introduce their partner. Ask volunteers to briefly describe an insight from their conversation.
- Distribute Bibles, Participant's Books, and Worship Leaflets for lesson 1.
- Formulate and get consensus on some simple ground rules for the study (for example, welcoming diverse points of view, maintaining confidentiality, and so on).

2. Morning Prayer 1

Worship Leaflet, lesson 1

- Light the candle, noting that it is a tangible reminder of the presence of the risen Christ.
- Encourage participants to settle into silence.
- Invite volunteers to lead portions of Morning Prayer from the Worship Leaflet, beginning with the Opening Sentences and ending after the Hymn.

Teaching Tip

This quarter, “God’s Exceptional Choice,” traces the arc of salvation history from Abraham to Jesus and on to the early church. The first two units span the first part of the Hebrew Scriptures, chronicling the origin of the chosen people and the move to nationhood. They cover passages from Genesis through First Samuel. If your group has been studying together for some time, most members may be biblically literate and quite familiar with the passages presented here for study. Encourage them to read these passages with fresh eyes, opening themselves to new insights the Spirit may have for them.

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 12:1-7; 15:1-7

12:1 Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, ⁶Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. . . .

15:1-7 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” ²But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” ³And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.” ⁴But the word of the LORD came to him, “This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.” ⁵He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” ⁶And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

⁷Then he said to him, “I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess.”

Note: Find Scripture Notes for this reading on the final page of the lesson.

Bible Study

3. Scripture Reading

Participant’s Book, p. 2

- Form two groups. Invite one group to read Genesis 12:1-7 in unison and the other Genesis 15:1-7.
- Option: Call attention to Scripture Note 4, where we read that the three phases of God’s call on Abram identify the spheres of influence in his life that he must leave behind. Invite the group to enter the Scripture through imaginative visualization. Read aloud, or ask a volunteer to read, Genesis 12:1-7. Encourage participants to reflect in silence on the following:
 1. If God came to you and asked that you leave everything familiar behind, what would you be leaving?

2. If you were old, like Abram and Sarai, how do you think you would respond? If you were young?

- Option: Read aloud, or have a volunteer read, Genesis 15: 1–7. Encourage participants to reflect in silence as before on the following:
 1. How might Abram and Sarai, still childless, have felt about trusting God’s promises? How do you think you would have felt?
 2. Imagine gazing up at the night sky, with nothing to dim the stars. What are you thinking about God’s expansive promises?Encourage participants to reflect further on these passages as they continue in the lesson’s exploration.

4. A Promised Blessing

Participant’s Book, p. 3

- Abram and Sarai’s choice is surprising because of their life setting.
 1. What details about the setting are cited to support this?
 2. What is surprising—and perhaps risky—about the location of the altar Abram erects to the Holy One? What does its location suggest about Abram’s confidence in God’s promise?
- Perhaps later, Abram thought he had misunderstood and God really expected him to utilize the ancient law that would let him adopt the slave Eliezer to fulfill the duties as an heir.
 1. When have you experienced frustration and impatience about how things were working out? How did you respond?
 2. If you did not use the optional Scripture activity, ask participants now to imagine what the starry sky might have looked like in the desert two millennia ago. Ask them to respond to this open-ended prompt using a metaphor that makes sense today: God told Abram that his offspring would be as many as . . . (for example, the grains of sand on a beach).
- As a result of this belief, God declared Abram righteous.
 1. How does the author interpret Abram’s righteousness?
 2. In what ways have you trusted in God’s call and promise to you?

5. A Journey of Faith

Participant’s Book, p. 4

- The call promised that Abram and Sarai would *be blessed* and would *be a blessing* for all the families of the earth.
 1. Invite one or more volunteers to describe what nuances the words “you will be a blessing” have in the Hebrew Scriptures.
 2. How would you describe the power and significance of names in the Hebrew Scriptures?
 3. How did Abram and Sarai’s trust in God to lead and prepare the way eventually became a faith model for the Hebrew people?
 4. Invite the group to reflect in silence on the following: What are some key moments in your own journey of faith?

6. Stepping into the World

Participant's Book, p. 5

- The main idea for this lesson speaks to the fact that circumstances and expectations in our lives sometimes conflict. We may question how to find our blessing and how to be a blessing to others within our current situation. Discuss:
 1. The author thinks of Abram and Sarai as classic examples of “living in the meantime.” When has this been your experience?
 2. We know that some people have difficulty living up to their commitments. The author speculates: Did Abram and Sarai have friends and relatives who had let them down before? Had they themselves backed out of some pledges? Invite participants to reflect on the following, and then to respond to one or more of the questions in their journals:
 - When have friends or relatives let you down? When have you backed out of pledges you have made?
 - In what circumstances have you experienced “living in the meantime”?
 - What helps you get through times when life is not what you want or hope for and change seems unlikely?
 - What helps you to confirm the conviction that God's promises are sure and will never be broken?
- Choose between these optional ideas for exploring the Scriptures:
 1. Form pairs. Ask participants to work together to create a list of promises our culture makes about “the good life.” In the full group, have pairs name the promises they listed. Ask: How does this list compare with the promises God makes?
 2. The author of the Participant's Book asks (p. 4): What are some key moments in your own journey of faith? Invite participants to make a timeline of their journey of faith, making notations along the way of those key moments. Participants may prefer to keep their faith journey timelines private, or volunteers may want to speak about some part of their faith journey.
 3. Suggest that participants write an encouraging note to a friend who, like Abram, is waiting for God's promises to be fulfilled. Or they might address the note to themselves.

Closing Worship

7. Morning Prayer 2

Worship Leaflet, lesson 1

- Invite the participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet, and enlist volunteers to lead remaining portions of Morning Prayer.
- Begin with the Prayer of the Day, pray the Lord's Prayer, and end with the Dismissal.
- Bless and challenge participants as they leave, saying, “(Name), God will bless you so that you will be a blessing.”
- Extinguish the candle.

SCRIPTURE NOTES

The following notes provide additional information about today's Scripture.

1. The cycle of invitation, obedience, promise, faith, and blessing Abram experienced is repeated throughout Scripture (for example, Jacob, David, Deborah, Mary, Paul) and the history of the church. We experience this same cycle in a continual spiral of spiritual growth as God grows us up in God's image (Rom. 5:1–5; 2 Pet. 1:4–9).
2. God made a promise before Abram asked for anything. This is unlike any other religious system in Abraham's day or in our own. The Holy One takes the first step, and so proves that God is unlike any other person or power in existence. The power and kindness in initiating this promise is matched only by God's patience and faithfulness in finally fulfilling it.
3. Even though Abram trusted God, he impatiently tried to force God's hand (Gen. 16). God rejected Abram's efforts to *help* fulfill the promise, knowing that the divine plan was better than Abram's efforts.
4. The three phases of God's call on Abram identify the spheres of influence in his life that Abram must leave behind. They move from broad strokes to specific areas: from "your country," from "your people," and from "your father's household." God progressively removes every security from Abram, forcing Abram to rely completely on God. (See Matt. 16:24–26 for a similar challenge from Jesus.)
5. God identifies God's self to Abram (15:1, 7) in terms of Abram's experience of the divine. It is Abram's experience of the Holy One that should be his rationale for continued faith in God's promises. Paul uses these Scriptures to defend the doctrine of justification by faith (Gal. 2–4). God declared Abram righteous on the basis of his faith in the divine promise and not on the basis of Abram's obedient actions.
6. The blessing God promises Abram sets the themes for the rest of Genesis: land, family, and name. And while the promise that Abram will "be a blessing" (12:2) refers to Abram's influence (in these spheres) over those around him, it also parallels the prophetic words in Zechariah 8:16, in which Israel's role as a blessing is primarily in attracting others toward the God who blesses.

ENGAGE YOUR LEARNERS DURING THE WEEK

Send an email or a text:

1. Suggesting that participants gaze at the stars, or find an image of a starry sky online, and reflect on the blessings in their own lives.
2. Encouraging them to reflect on Psalm 75:1 as a part of their devotional times in the coming week.