

Gen. 12:1–4a

Ps. 121

Rom. 4:1–5, 13–17

John 3:1–17 or

Matthew 17:1–9

God Blesses

Goal for the Session

Adults will delve into the story of Abram and discern what it means to be blessed by God to be a blessing.

■ 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

Bless you! Bless her heart! What a blessing! Adults have heard these phrases, and many more like them. Depending on their life experiences, some may think of blessings in terms of having the “good things” of life—health, material comforts, family. Some may feel that they have not been blessed because of the hard times they have endured. Some may resent individuals whom they perceive to have received more blessings than they have. This session offers group members food for thought about the nature of God’s blessing.

Thank you, generous Creator, for blessing me as your child. Guide me to reflect your goodness and blessing to each person I meet. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- pillar candle, lighter
- purple cloth or placemat
- board or newsprint
- markers
- Bibles
- map of ancient Near East that includes Ur, Haran, and Canaan
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for March 12, 2023

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2, colored pencils or fine-tipped markers
- option 2: supplies for project chosen
- option 3: construction paper, markers

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, if you are using option 2, bring information about a service or mission project your church is doing during Lent or choose a local ministry organization to help.

Welcome adults to the Second Sunday in Lent as you spread the purple cloth or placemat in the center of your learning space. Place the candle on the cloth and light it. Pray aloud:

Holy God, we gather today seeking your good news. Open to us the mysteries of your mercy. Amen.

Ask adults to recall phrases they have either said or heard that include the word *bless*. Discuss:

✠ What are some definitions of the word “bless”? (*Welcome all responses and record them on newsprint or the board.*)

Comment that the focus scripture invites an exploration of the meaning of God’s blessing.

EXPLORING

To set the context for the focus scripture, ask adults to look for a map of the ancient Near East in their Bibles or show the map you brought. Have a volunteer read aloud Genesis 11:31–32. Ask adults to locate Ur and Haran on the map. Note that the Bible does not say why Terah moved his family.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 12:1–4a. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1, and ask a volunteer to read aloud the “What?” excerpt. Discuss:

✠ Based on the Hebrew understanding of blessing, what might we add to the list of definitions started in Gathering? (*Add responses the list on newsprint or the board.*)



FEASTING on the WORD

CURRICULUM

God Blesses

Many study Bibles have excellent maps in the back. In addition, your church library may have a Bible atlas you can borrow. If you want an online map to view on a computer or to project, try a Web site like bit.ly/BibleMaps.

Have adults refer to the map of the ancient Near East while you read aloud Genesis 12:5–9. Wonder together about the hardships Abram and Sarai might have faced on this journey and the doubts they might have had about God’s blessing.

There are references to Abram (God gives him the name Abraham in Genesis 17) in the New Testament. As a group, read Acts 3:25; Romans 4:13–17; Galatians 3:6–9, 16; and Hebrews 11:8–16. Discuss:

- ✿ Why do you think these early Christians considered the story of Abram to be important to their mission?

Read aloud the following information about blessing from Donald P. Olsen:

First, a blessing may be understood as a sense of well-being or the presence of peace in the life of the recipient . . . The whole of humanity is blessed by God’s creation of the creatures of sky, field, and sea; the grains, vegetables, and fruits for harvest; and the system of sun, rain, soil, and wind that maintains them for our use and consumption. This blessing is expanded further for a third understanding that includes the gifts, talents, and abilities—even biological abilities—that God bestows upon individuals. (*Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 2* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010], 54.)

Discuss:

- ✿ When have you felt a strong sense of God’s blessing and guidance? When have you longed for such a sense?
- ✿ What examples of God’s blessing as the presence of peace have you experienced in your own life or seen in the lives of others? What examples of God’s blessing as the abundance of creation? What examples of God’s blessing as the gifts, talents, and abilities that God bestows on individuals?

Ask a volunteer to read aloud the “So What?” excerpt on Resource Sheet 1. Discuss:

- ✿ What blessings have we, as individuals and as the church, received from those who have gone before us?
- ✿ How might our response to God’s blessing become a blessing to others?

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session:

1. **Meditation** Adults will enter a time of meditation about God’s blessing. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Bless) and set out colored pencils or fine-tipped markers. Invite adults to trace the letters with their fingers or color the designs as you read aloud the following paragraph, pausing as noted:

The city Haran, from which Abram is called, means “highway” or “crossroads.” God’s call to Abram at this crossroads and Abram’s faithful response is the starting point of Israel’s history. [pause] . . . This text could be used to explore your own crossroads; the needs, callings, and challenges of your congregation as well as the

EASY
PREP

faithful response of its individual members to God's call. Such exploration may lead to naming some of the unique crossroads faced by your congregation and perhaps the demarcation of new starting points in the ministry of your church. [pause] Sunday school teachers, ushers, deacons, liturgists, lay preachers, and individuals sensing a call to ordained ministry are at a crossroad. [pause] Do I have the time? [pause] Do I have the gifts and talents, the skill set for this task? (Donald P. Olsen, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 2* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010], 54.) [pause]

- ✿ Where might God be calling me to go? [pause]
- ✿ Who might be blessed through me? [pause]

Lead me to live as your blessing, God. Amen.

2. **Blessing Project** Adults will choose a way to be reflections of God's blessing during Lent. Ask a volunteer to read the "Now What?" excerpt on Resource Sheet 1. If your church is engaged in Lenten mission or serving projects, tell the group about these. Invite them to add any details they know. Or tell about a community ministry that is in need of help. As a group, decide how the group can participate in one of these projects during Lent. If necessary, ask for volunteers to coordinate the effort.
3. **Blessing Posters** Adults will communicate their understanding of blessing to younger members of the church. Write "God's blessing is like _____." on newsprint or the board. Ask adults to imagine they are explaining God's blessing to children or teenagers. Brainstorm ways to complete this sentence. Set out construction paper and markers, and invite participants to work individually or in partners to make a mini-poster that incorporates one of these explanations. Ask volunteers to put these on doors or bulletin boards in the area where children meet for Sunday school.

Encourage adults to be creative with color, graphic design, and illustrations that will appeal to children and youth.

CLOSING

Light the candle, if necessary. Invite adults to focus on the flame as they pray silently for wisdom in honoring the blessings they have received from God. After a few moments, read aloud Psalm 121, the psalm appointed for the Second Sunday in Lent.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for March 12, 2023, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and Resource Sheet 1 before the next 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.

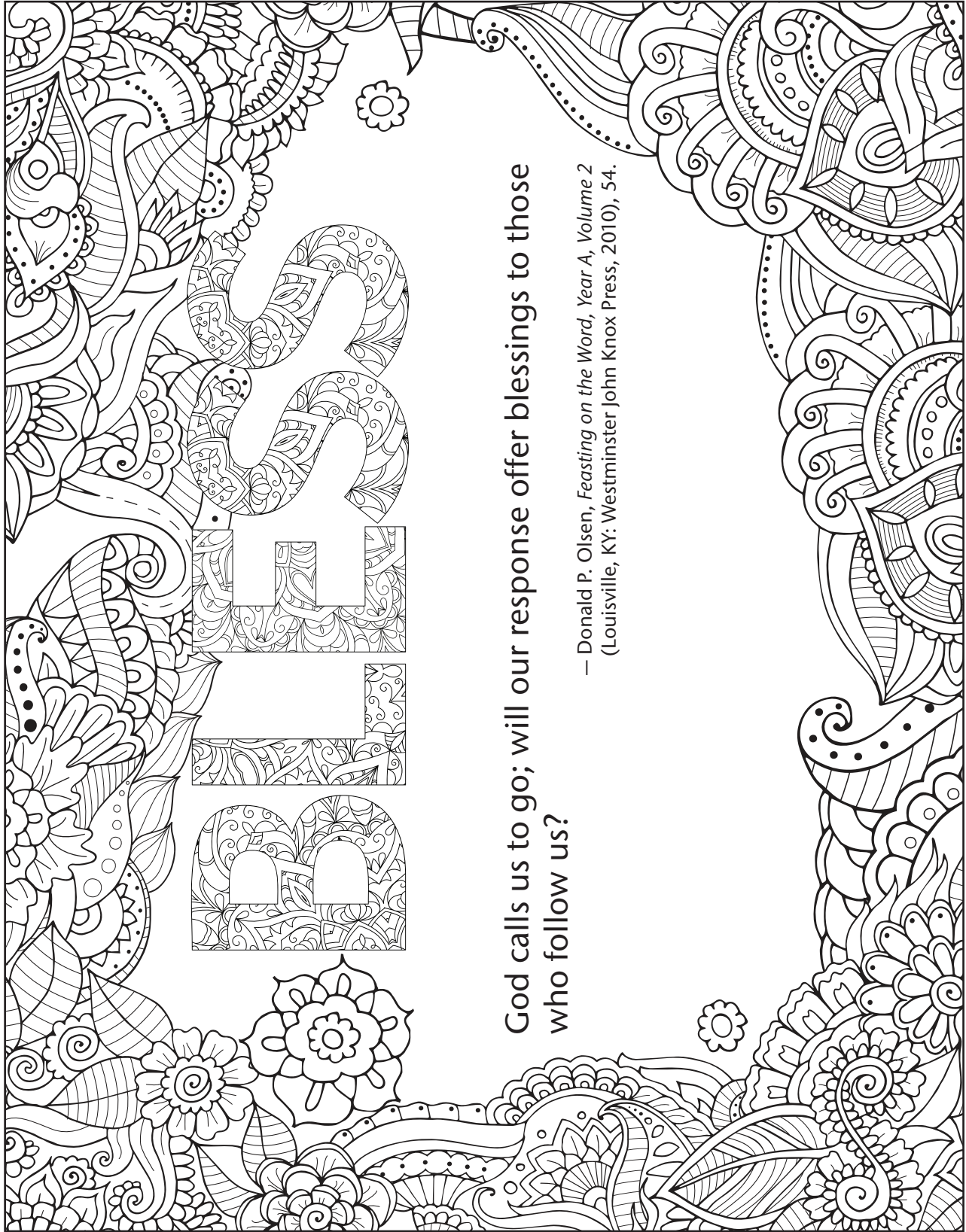
NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—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.

Bless



God calls us to go; will our response offer blessings to those who follow us?

— Donald P. Olsen, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 2* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 54.