

Gen. 12:1–4a

Ps. 121

Rom. 4:1–5, 13–17

John 3:1–17 or

Matthew 17:1–9

Loving Promise

Goal for the Session

Children will hear the story of the call of Abram and Sarai and affirm that God’s love surrounds them wherever they may go.

■ 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

Although children this age are becoming more independent, they still long to know that the significant people in their lives are present for them and will stick by them. They have experienced time away from their parents or other loving caregivers and understand that these adults cannot always be with them. The fact that God is always present and surrounds them with love at such times may provide a sense of security. This week, affirm that God's promise of steadfast love was made to all Abram and Sarai's descendants, which includes the children, their families, and you!

Loving God, as I prepare to lead this session, help me to recognize your constant and loving presence in my life. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- basket
- purple cloth
- battery-powered candle
- Bible, bookmark
- Our Path through Lent (Color Pack 1, 2)
- Color Pack 3, 4, 29, 30
- scissors
- toy car
- Singing the Feast*, 2022–2023; CD player
- Resource Sheet 1
- glue stick
- sticky notes
- markers
- small heart stickers

For Responding

- option 2: paper lunch sacks; markers; stickers; stapler; small gifts, such as votive candles, wrapped candies, bookmarks
- option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 2 on card stock, unsharpened pencils, tape, scissors, crayons

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, place in the basket: purple cloth; candle; Bible with bookmark at Genesis 12. Display Our Path through Lent (Color Pack 1, 2), and cut out the picture for the Second Sunday in Lent from Color Pack 3. If you are using option 2 in Responding, ask your pastor or visiting committee for names of individuals who would appreciate a gift bag, and plan how to deliver them. If you are using option 3, for each child bring one copy of Resource Sheet 2 (God's Love) on card stock and one unsharpened pencil.

Welcome each child by name as they arrive.

Gather around the table. Invite the children to take the items out of the basket and arrange them on the table. Recall that the purple cloth tells us we are in the season of Lent. Ask another child to light the candle as a reminder that God is always with you. Pray aloud:

Loving God, thank you for being here with us today. Help us learn more about you and your love. Amen.

Sing "The Circle of Love" (Color Pack 29; track 5 on *Singing the Feast*, 2022–2023).

Show the toy car, and invite learners to think quietly about where they would like to go if everyone in your group could go on a trip together. After a moment, invite each child, in turn, to hold the car and tell where he or she would like the group to go. Discuss:

✿ When have you been on a long trip?

✿ What would it be like to set out on a trip if you did not know where you were going?

Comment that today's Bible story is about a family who went on a long journey that God had planned.



FEASTING on the WORD

CURRICULUM

Loving Promise

The Circle of Love

The circle of love goes
around, around,
The circle of love goes
around.

Stop, reach out, your sister
needs you,
And the circle of love goes
around.

Listen, someone is crying,
Wondering why she's been
denied.

Stop, reach out, your sister
needs you,
And the circle of love goes
around.

The circle of love goes
around, around,
The circle of love goes
around.

Stop, reach out, your
brother needs you,
And the circle of love goes
around.

Look, someone is searching,
Trying to find his way back.
Stop, reach out, your
brother needs you,
And the circle of love goes
around.

The circle of love goes
around, around,
The circle of love goes
around.

Stop, reach out, someone
needs you,
And the circle of love goes
around.

No one can travel life's road
all alone;
We all need a friend now
and then.

Stop, reach out, someone
needs you,
And the circle of love goes
around.

The circle of love goes
around, around,
The circle of love goes
around.

Stop, reach out, someone
needs you,
And the circle of love goes
around.

EXPLORING

Invite a child to pick up the Bible, open it to the page with the bookmark, and hold it up for others to see. Explain that the story today comes from the very first book of the Bible called Genesis. Recall that the word Genesis means "beginnings." Tell the story using Resource Sheet 1 (Unexpected Journey.)

Invite the children to act out the story. Designate one area as Haran and another as Canaan. As you read the story again, have learners pack imaginary tents and belongings, load them on imaginary camels, and travel from Haran to Canaan. Sit together in the Canaan area and discuss:

- ✿ What did God tell Abram and Sarai to do?
- ✿ How do you think Abram and Sarai felt about what God told them to do? (Ask "what else" several times to deepen the discussion.)
- ✿ What did God promise to Abram and Sarai?
- ✿ How do you think God's promises helped Abram and Sarai find the courage to make the journey to Canaan?

Gather around Our Path through Lent. Recall that Lent is a time to remember that God is with us as we move toward Easter. Ask a child to move the heart marker to the space for March 5. Point to the first picture and invite learners to briefly recall that story. Show the picture for today, the Second Sunday in Lent (Color Pack 3), and ask a child to glue it to the March 5 space. Review that today's story is about how God's love surrounded Abram and Sarai. Speak the following cheer, asking learners to repeat each phrase:

*God's love surrounded Abram and Sarai, / and God's love surrounds us.
/ Thanks be to God!*

Affirm that no matter where we are or what we are doing, God's love is with us. Name a time during the day (bedtime, waking up, recess, mealtime, at school, with friends, doing chores) and encourage children to act out what they would be doing at that time. After a few seconds, call out, "Freeze!" After everyone freezes the action, whisper, "God's love is always with you." Repeat with a different time during the day. Invite volunteers to name a time, call for the freeze, and whisper the affirmation.

Show Color Pack 4 and ask the children to identify Abram and Sarai. Read the words in unison several times. Proclaim that God's promises are for all God's people, and that means you and them. Set out sticky notes and markers. Ask each learner to print his or her name on a sticky note. Play "Behold, I Am with You" (track 3 on *Singing the Feast, 2022–2023*) as learners place their sticky notes on poster.

EASY
PREP

Praise God

(Tune: The Hokey Pokey)

We put our right arm in,
we put our right arm out;
We praise God together as
we shake our arm about.
We know God love
surrounds us as we turn
ourselves around.
That's what it's all about.

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Sing Praises** Children will enjoy singing an action song to affirm that God's love surrounds them. Invite children to stand in a circle. Sing the lyrics in the sidebar to the tune of "The Hokey Pokey." (You can hear the tune at bit.ly/FWWhokeyPokey.) Do the actions as described in the lyrics. Ask learners to sing the song with you. Repeat the stanza, substituting "left arm," "right leg," "left leg," and "whole self." Option: If the children enjoy this song, arrange for them to visit another Sunday school class and teach it to them.
- 2. Gift Bags** Children will assemble small gift bags to encourage others with the promise of God's loving presence. Tell learners about the individuals who will receive the gift bags they make. Distribute paper lunch sacks and markers. Have learners print an encouraging message such as "God's love surrounds you" or "God is always with you" on the front of the sack. Demonstrate how to place a gift in the sack, fold over the top edges, staple three times on the fold, and place a sticker on top of each staple. Lead learners in praying for the people who will receive these gifts.
- 3. Pencil Topper** Children will make and spin pencil toppers as they affirm that God's love surrounds them wherever they go. Lead learners in following the instructions on Resource Sheet 2 (God's Love). If there is time, have learners make a second pencil topper to give to a friend.

CLOSING

Gather the group around candle. Point to Our Path through Lent and invite the children to tell what they remember about the story of Abram and Sarai. Place heart stickers on the children's hands as a reminder that God's love surrounds them wherever they are.

Blessed to Be a Blessing

Refrain:

We are blessed to be
a blessing,
we are blessed to be
a blessing,
we are blessed to be
a blessing,
growing in the grace of
God.

Just like Abraham and Sarah,
just like Abraham and Sarah,
just like Abraham and Sarah,
growing in the grace of
God.

Refrain

Play the refrain and first stanza of "Blessed to Be a Blessing" (Color Pack 30; track 4 on *Singing the Feast, 2022–2023*). Tell how God later changed Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's to Sarah. These new names were a sign of God's blessing and love. Read the words together and then sing them. Encourage the children to dance around and sing as the music plays.

Close with a circle blessing. In turn, each learner will turn to the person on her or his right and say, "(Name), God's love surrounds you." Begin with the person on your right.

Thank learners for coming, and say you hope to see them next week.

An Unexpected Journey

Abram and his wife, Sarai, lived in a city called Haran. One day, something surprising happened. God spoke to Abram!

“Abram, I want you and Sarai to leave Haran,” God said. “Pack up all your things and go to a new home that I will show you. Don’t worry about taking a map—I will show you the way.”

God knew it would be hard for Abram and Sarai to leave everything and set out on a journey without knowing where they were going. So God made a promise to Abram.

“Abram, I will bless you and bring many good things into your life. I will be with you and Sarai every step of the way. I will make your family into a great family. Your grandchildren and their children will live in many lands. Everyone on earth will be blessed because of you.”

Even though it was a very scary thing to do, Abram and Sarai trusted God. They left Haran, just as God had told them to do.

Abram and Sarai took their animals, their possessions, and their servants and set out for the land that God would show them. Every day they walked and walked, and when evening came they set up their tents and rested. Day after day they traveled along the roads that God showed them. It was a very long journey. And God was with Abram and Sarai every step of the way.

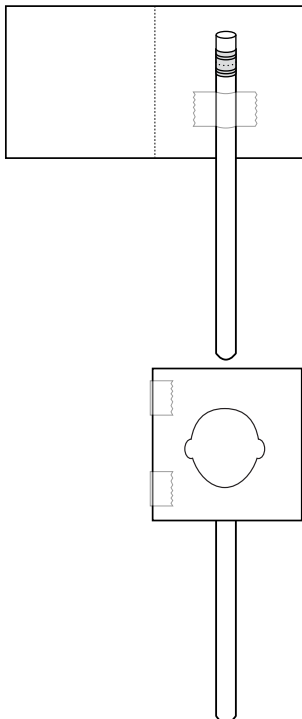
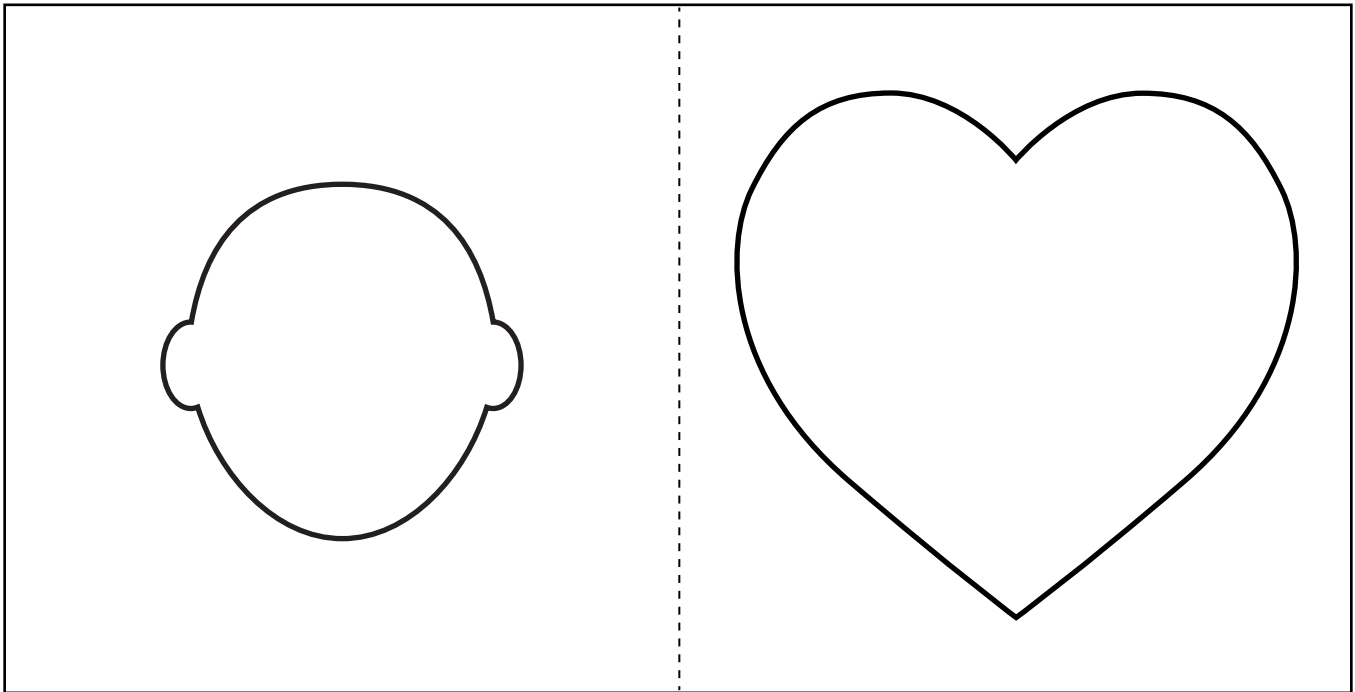
After many weeks, Abram and Sarai came to the land of Canaan. God spoke to Abram, “Now you are home. Look around. This is the land I am giving to you and your family.”

How happy they were! Their long journey was over at last! Abram wanted to mark the spot, so he set up a great big pile of stones to make an altar. Then Abram, Sarai, and all their servants gathered around this stone altar and said a prayer of thanks to God. They had come to their new home at last.



God's Love

The story of Abram and Sarai reminds us that God's love surrounds us wherever we go.



Directions:

1. Cut out the rectangle.
2. Color the heart shape.
3. Color the face to look like you.
4. Fold the paper in half along the dotted line. Place the fold at the side.
5. Open the rectangle and tape the eraser end of a pencil in the center of the rectangle, with the pencil pointing straight down.
6. Close the rectangle and tape the edges shut.
7. Hold the bottom of the pencil between your palms and roll it back and forth very quickly. Watch the face and see what happens!