

# 1

# Leave Your Comfort Zone

GENESIS 12:1-9



## GOAL

Children explore Abram's and Sarai's call to follow God and consider how God goes with them as they cross borders into the unfamiliar.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: [bit.ly](https://bit.ly) addresses are case-sensitive.



## PRAYER

Loving God, thank you for calling us to stretch and grow. Thank you for being with us through transitions and helping us learn from new situations. Help us sense your presence when there are borders to be crossed. Amen.

## THIS SESSION

Crossing borders inherently involves movement, leaving a space that you find familiar and comforting and trekking beyond that into a new situation. The Bible is full of stories of individuals who were pretty satisfied with where they were when God called them to a new space, a new place. It is in the leaving of our comfort zones where God seems most at work, helping us rethink assumptions about our lives and explore new ways of being.

## THE BIBLE STORY

In Genesis 12:1-9, God calls Abram and Sarai to leave their home, community, and comfort zones and travel to a new place, which God promises to show them. They literally cross borders—geographic and national/ethnic—as they follow God's call to move thousands of miles from where they have settled with their wide extended family to an, as yet, unknown place. This first leaving sets them up for a lifetime of continued stretching, growing, and trusting, as God transforms their lives to be a blessing for not only their descendants but the whole world.

## CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

While children are not really in control of where they live or go to school, they may be able to identify with how difficult a task God was calling Abram and Sarai to. Children who have been “the new kid” at school or in an extracurricular event may identify with Abram's and Sarai's trying to cross over into a new place. The concept of a comfort zone may be new for some children, but the idea of what is known, familiar, and safe—and how hard it is to cross into the unknown and unfamiliar—will ring true for them.

## SESSION PREPARATION

- “Changing Perspectives” (p. 9): Determine a place where your group will move to change perspective.
- “Following God's Call” (p. 9): Obtain the *Cross Borders* infographic poster ([bit.ly/FMInfographicPosters](https://bit.ly/FMInfographicPosters), Year 3 Set).

Depending on the options you choose:

- “A Border-Crossing Story” (p. 11): Obtain *Stone Soup* by Jon J. Muth (Scholastic Press, 2003) or use the YouTube video “Stone Soup by Jon J. Muth: Children's Books Read Aloud on Once upon a Story” ([bit.ly/FMStoneSoup](https://bit.ly/FMStoneSoup), 7:43).



## GETTING STARTED

### EXPLORE YOUR COMFORT ZONE



Greet the children as they arrive. Engage them in conversation about their week, wondering what they did that they enjoyed most. When everyone has arrived, play a *four corners* game to help children identify some of their *comfort zones*. Identify four spaces in your room and ask the children to move to the corner of the room that represents something most comfortable or familiar for them. As you read each of the following choices, assign each to one corner of your space:

- Home, school, sports place, library
- Chicken tenders, pizza, spicy noodles, shrimp and grits
- Lake, beach, mountains, city
- Playing video games, playing a sport, being around animals, acting at drama club
- Making a class presentation, talking with a teacher, working with a group on a project, planning a trip to the movies with friends
- Traveling by: plane, car, train, bus
- Trying new foods, learning a new language, traveling far from home, making a new friend

When the children have explored some of the ways they are most comfortable, gather them together and talk about some of their similarities and differences, using the following questions:

- ✦ Did everyone have the same most-comfortable choices? Why or why not?
- ✦ What does it feel like when you have the chance to do something that is not in your comfort zone?
- ✦ Have you ever tried a new activity, traveled far from home, or visited a friend's house that was very different from your own?
- ✦ What things were hardest about that experience?
- ✦ What did you find surprising?
- ✦ How did that experience help you to grow or understand things in a new way?

Tell the children that today they will explore what it means to leave one's comfort zone and what opportunities that provides.

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- Copies of Resource Page 1
  - Glory to God* hymnal or hymnal with the tune THE SERVANT SONG or internet-connected device



Keep copies of Resource Page 1 for use in sessions 2, 3, and 4.

### PILGRIMS ON A JOURNEY



Distribute copies of Resource Page 1 and teach the children the words to the first verse of “We Are Pilgrims on a Journey,” by lining out each phrase and having the children repeat after you. Then sing the verse together to the familiar tune THE SERVANT SONG (*Glory to God*, #727, or another hymnal with that tune); for instrumental accompaniment, play the YouTube video “The Servant Song” ([bit.ly/FMServantSongInstrumental](https://bit.ly/FMServantSongInstrumental), 2:26, stopping at 0:42).

Lead the litany on the Resource Page, inviting the children to speak the lines in bold together and follow the instructions for the actions associated with each line. You may need to assist in reading as the children become familiar with the litany.



## INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

### CHANGING PERSPECTIVES

AM A C

Tell the children that they will experience a bit of what it's like to leave one's comfort zone by going to another location together. Take the group to the location you have chosen: the fellowship hall, another room, a hallway, the sanctuary, outdoors, the kitchen, or other place. When you get there, invite the children to make some observations using the following questions:

- What looks different from our usual location? What can you hear or smell or feel that is different?
- What is fun about being in this new place?
- What is unsettling or uncomfortable?
- Do you wonder if the *rules* of our group are different here? Do you know what is expected in this space?
- Are you a person who likes to shake things up and try unexpected things or one who likes to know what is coming?

Comment that they may have moved only a little way from the comfort zone of their own meeting space, but just moving that little bit can provide a new way of looking at the world. Invite everyone to think about another time in their lives when they had to leave their comfort zone. Some ideas might be that they moved into a new place or started a new school or activity. Perhaps they visited a place that was not familiar, or met people who lived differently. Provide paper and drawing supplies. Invite the children to draw a picture of that experience. When they have finished, return to your usual space and allow volunteers to share what they drew.

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- Paper
  - Markers, crayons, colored pencils



## FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

### FOLLOWING GOD'S CALL

NS C

Invite four children each to make a quick line drawing on a small sticky-note paper of one of the following pictures: a tent, a tree with a stack of stones, a tent with a stack of stones, and a palm tree. While they are drawing, set the scene for the Bible story. Tell the children that long, long ago, Abram and Sarai (God would later change their names to Abraham and Sarah) lived with their large extended family and community. They were faithful followers of God, but they were sad because they had never had any children. Explain that, in that culture, having children meant that your family line would be continued. There would be children to take care of you and help with daily living. Tell the children that they will hear a story that took Abram and Sarai out of their comfort zone but had a huge promise with it.

Display the *Cross Borders* infographic poster and draw the children's attention to the map of the Middle East, explaining that it shows many of the lands mentioned in the Bible. Invite four volunteers to take turns

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- Cross Borders* infographic poster
  - Four small sticky-note papers
  - Four pencils or pens
  - Bible
  - Resource Page 2
  - Bags cut out of Resource Page 3
  - Tape or glue sticks
  - Markers

pointing out the places on the map that the children will hear in the Bible story. Tell the four children who drew the pictures on the sticky-note paper that they will place them on the poster at certain points in the story. Read aloud Genesis 12:1–9, pausing when the following places are mentioned in the story, and have the corresponding sticky-note pictures placed near them: Haran (tent), Shechem (tree with stack of stones), Bethel (tent with stack of stones), Negeb (palm tree). After the story, engage the children in conversation about Abram’s and Sarai’s journey using the following questions:

- ✦ What did God tell Abram and Sarai to do?
- ✦ What was going to happen to them if they responded as God asked? (*see vv. 1–3*)
- ✦ What did Abram and Sarai have to do or change to follow God’s call?
- ✦ What do you think they had to give up? What new things might they have to take on to follow the call? (*maybe learn a new language, take down their tent and travel often, meet new people with different customs, and so forth*)
- ✦ What are some things that might have been outside their comfort zone?
- ✦ Why do you think they chose to do what God asked?
- ✦ Do you think that following God changed the way they knew and understood God? Why or why not?

Post Resource Page 2, the picture of Abram and Sarai and their bags. Display the bags cut from Resource Page 3 and invite volunteers to take turns reading aloud the contents of the bags that are labeled. Suggest that Abram and Sarai needed to pack those qualities as well as their belongings. Tape or glue those bags to the picture. Wonder what other qualities Abram and Sarai would need and have volunteers write on the bags without labels, those on the picture and extras from Resource Page 3. Ask the children which of these qualities—maybe more than one—they have needed to help them do something new or out of their comfort zone, such as join a group, meet a friend, or so on.



Keep the completed Resource Page 3 for use in “Border-Crossing Scenes (below) and “A Border-Crossing Story” (p. 11).



## FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

- Cards cut apart from Resource Page 4
- Completed Resource Page 3 from “Following God’s Call” (above)

### BORDER-CROSSING SCENES



Form groups of three or four children, or work together as one group. Give each group a situation card cut apart from Resource Page 4. Ask the children to talk together in their group about the situation on their card, one or more ways that the person might choose to cross a border to follow God in that situation, and how they will act out the scene with what happens when a border is crossed. After each group acts out their situation, ask the whole group the following questions:

- ✦ What is hard about crossing the borders between the main character and others in this scene?
- ✦ What characteristics from Abram’s and Sarai’s bags might these characters need to help them cross the border?
- ✦ How will they know that God is with them as they cross this border?

## A BORDER-CROSSING STORY

C T

Tell the children that they will hear a story that may be familiar about stone soup. Invite the children to listen to the story with a new perspective, considering crossing borders as they hear the story. Read aloud *Stone Soup* by Jon J. Muth or show the YouTube video “Stone Soup by Jon J. Muth: Children’s Books Read Aloud on Once upon a Story” ([bit.ly/FMStoneSoup](https://bit.ly/FMStoneSoup), 7:43). After the story, engage the children in conversation using the following questions:

- How did a pot of soup help the people find trust and happiness?
- What convinced them to cross borders of their own safe houses to join the party?
- Why did the little girl talk to the monks? Why did others come out?
- What happened because of people’s willingness to work together?
- Thinking about the bags on the picture of Abram and Sarai (*from “Following God’s Call”* (pp. 9–10), what did these folks need to have to cross borders with their own neighbors? What other things were needed?

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- Stone Soup* by Jon J. Muth (Scholastic Press, 2003) or internet-connected device
  - Completed Resource Page 3 from “Following God’s Call” (pp. 9–10)



## PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

### CROSS THE BORDER!

AM

Place a line of masking or painter’s tape on the floor and have all the children stand on one side of it. Tell the children that today this line will represent a border, something to cross. Comment that, most of the time when we have to step out of our comfort zone, it doesn’t mean literally stepping from one zone to another. Explain that they will have a little fun today thinking about taking a literal step across a border that they face in life. Invite each child to think of some way that might be a little challenging, or take them out of their comfort zone. Some examples might include experiencing a different culture than their own, welcoming new people, or speaking up when someone is being treated unfairly. Invite the children to take turns sharing their challenging border and then to step, hop, dance, twirl, or cross the border in any other way to the other side. Encourage the rest of the group to cheer on each child as they name this challenge and move into it in their own unique way.

Once everyone is across the border, gather the children in a circle and invite them to think of one way that they can work on the challenge they presented for themselves this week. Have the children take turns sharing their ideas. Give positive feedback and encouragement as each child does so.

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- Masking or painter’s tape

### BORDER-CROSSING INK

A C

Give each child a coffee filter and several paper towels. Have them put their coffee filter on top of their stack of paper towels, explaining that this will prevent the ink from markers bleeding through to the table. Provide a variety of colored markers, and invite the children to draw and write on their coffee filter using multiple colors. Encourage them to write or draw pictures of some of the borders between people that they have seen at school, at home, or in the community. They may also want to draw some lines, boxes, or borders to decorate the filter. When children finish, show them how to

- 
- Coffee filters
  - Paper towels
  - Variety of colored markers
  - Spray bottle filled with water



Be open to all the answers that may come up. Borders and boundaries can both box us in and make us feel safe!

spray a small amount of water onto their coffee filter and watch the colors spread and mingle into new, colorful patterns! Hang the filters up to dry as you talk about the following:

- ✦ How do borders and boundaries make you feel?
- ✦ What was it like to watch your writing and drawing change when you added the water?
- ✦ Do you think that sometimes crossing borders from our comfort zones can be messy? Sometimes exciting? Do you have an example of either one of those?



## FOLLOWING JESUS

### A PRAYER FOR BORDER CROSSINGS



Have the children stand in a circle with their arms crossed, right over left. Invite everyone to hold hands with the people on both sides of them without uncrossing their arms. Without letting go of their neighbors' hands, show them how to raise their arms and turn toward the right, so that the circle flips inside out. Once they have learned the motion, have them start again facing inward, with arms crossed.

Pray the following prayer, inviting them to flip the circle when indicated:

Lord, we thank you for things familiar: for our families and homes and favorite foods and belongings. We also thank you for calling us past the familiar, for inviting us to cross borders (*flip the circle*) to step out of our comfort zones, because we know you are leading us to serve in ways we can't even imagine. Amen.

# Pilgrims on a Journey Song and Litany

Tune: THE SERVANT SONG

We are pilgrims on a journey  
to another time and place,  
singing songs and telling stories  
to recall God's love and grace.<sup>1</sup>

When we cross a border,  
When we travel from here to there,  
**Who are we?**

**Are we tourists?** (*pretend to take a picture*)

**Are we pilgrims?** (*pretend to hold a staff*)

**Are we refugees?** (*walk as if carrying a backpack*)

**Are we missionaries?** (*pretend to open a Bible*)

**Are we diplomats?** (*make the peace sign "V" with index and middle fingers*)

**Are we soldiers?** (*pretend to put on a helmet*)

**Are we students?** (*pretend to write in a notebook*)

**Are we teachers?** (*pretend to write on a chalkboard*)

When someone crosses a border and comes to where we are,  
When they travel from there to here,  
**Who are we?**

**Are we innkeepers?** (*pretend to hold a lantern out*)

**Are we family?** (*give an air hug*)

**Are we guardians?** (*cross arms and stand with feet spread apart*)

**Are we strangers?** (*place right hand on heart and stretch out left hand, palm out as in "stop"*)

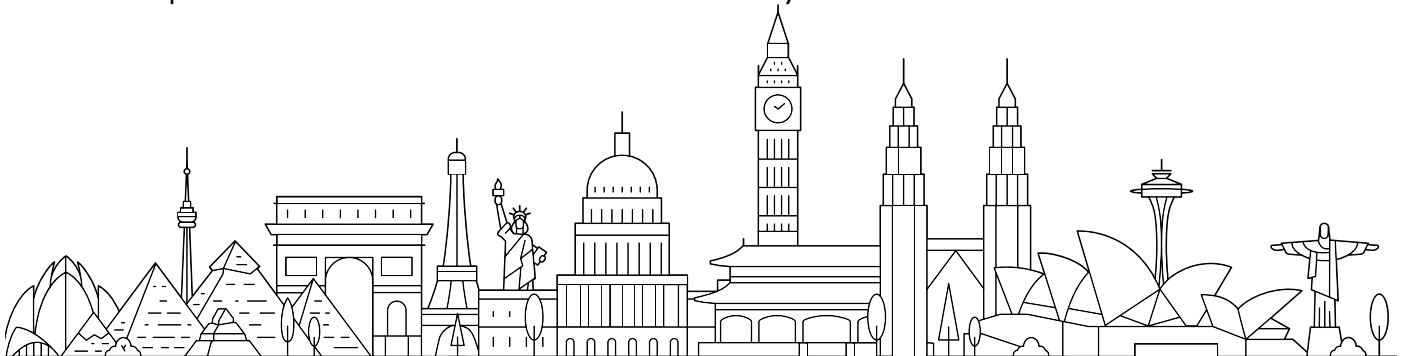
**Are we enemies?** (*put arms up in boxing stance*)

**Are we interpreters?** (*turn head from side to side pretending to talk to others*)

**Are we tour guides?** (*point to left and right as if pointing out sites*)

**Are we first responders?** (*pretend to hold up another person*)

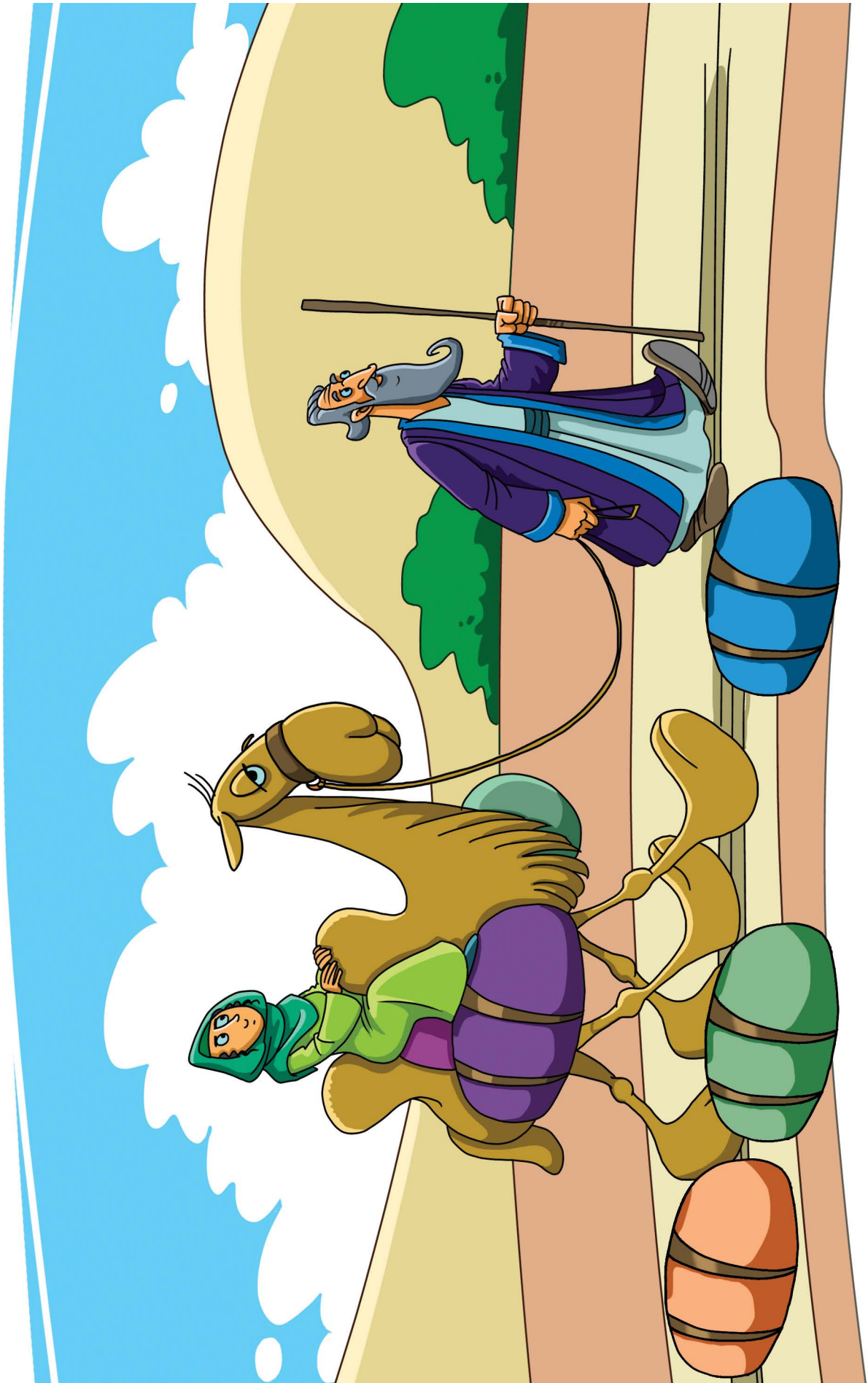
Let us step out and discover who we are and who they are.



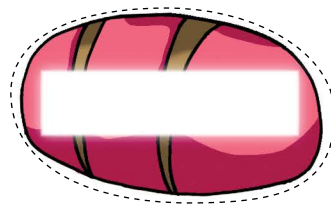
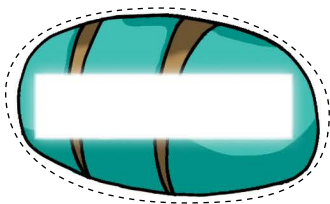
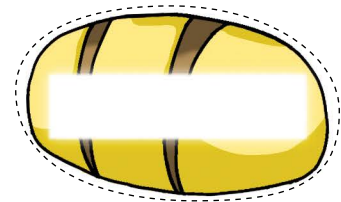
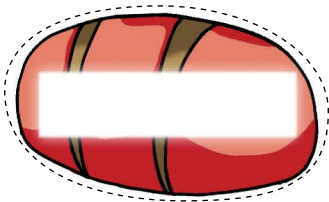
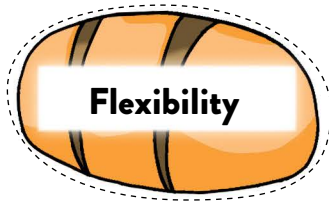
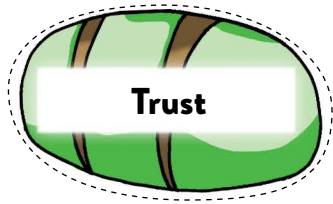
1. Text excerpted from "We Are Pilgrims on a Journey," by Mary Nelson Keithahn. © 2017 Wayne Leupold Editions, Inc. Used by permission.









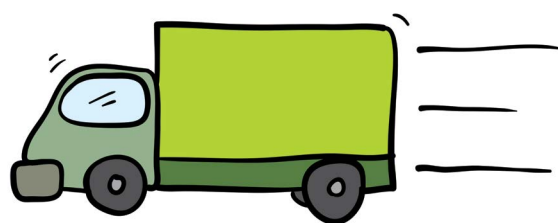




**Scene 1:** Kayleigh has gone to sleep-away church camp for the first time. She thought this would be fun, but now that her family has left, all she can do is cry. The bunkbed does not feel like her own, the food in the dining hall doesn't taste like the meals her dad cooks, and she really misses her dog, Chewy. The other girls in the cabin and their counselor come to check on her.



**Scene 2:** Marcus sees the moving van parked at the house next door. For months, he's been hoping that a boy his age will move in. He sees a couple of kids around his age helping to unload, so he goes over to say hello. The other children smile at him, but they greet him in a language he doesn't understand.



**Scene 3:** Iris and friends from her Sunday school class have decided to collect canned goods from their neighbors to share with folks who are hungry. Iris's mom has agreed to go with her to the neighbors' houses, but insists that Iris be the one to explain the project to them, and ask for donations. Iris is a little shy, and not sure she wants to do this, even though she knows that the food is very much needed.



**Scene 4:** Misha's family has just arrived in the United States from Ukraine. His hometown had become unsafe due to war, and a church has sponsored them to come to the US. On the first day of school, one of the church members and his mom take his little sisters and him to the elementary school for their first day. When they open up the classroom door, Misha sees many students' eyes turning toward him.

