



God chooses Abram

MEETING AIM

To explore what it means to follow God's calling.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Genesis 11:26-12:9, 13:14-18

BACKGROUND

This session is designed for you to do online in a group video call (on something like Facetime or Zoom). Make sure you have parental permission to do this, as well as following your church's safeguarding procedure.

It can be easy to think of key figures in the Old Testament just as characters in a story, but these were real people with real hopes, dreams and fears. For Abram, God's calling would have offered incredible blessings but also demanded real sacrifices. Through this session, we aim to help your young people reflect on what blessings and sacrifices might be involved if they choose to follow God's calling, and how to overcome any fear they might have about the future.

JOINING THE SESSION 5 MINS

As people join you online, ask them to share what they have been doing during the past seven days. Ask everyone how they feel about the future. Does it seem exciting? Frightening? Depressing? Something else? Try to draw out these feelings in a non-threatening way. If anyone clearly doesn't want to talk, don't make them. Be prepared to share your own feelings, too.

INTRO ACTIVITY 10 MINS

You will need: table tennis balls; a large saucepan; a hard floor or table; wrapped sweets

Make sure everyone has a table tennis ball and a large saucepan. Each player should place the saucepan two metres away from them, on a table or hard floor, in view of their camera. Let the players take it in turns to bounce their balls into the saucepan. (The ball must bounce once, then land in the pan.) Offer a to deliver a wrapped sweet to anyone who succeeds. They may either 'keep' it or give it up for the possibility of a prize twice as big.

If anyone chooses to gamble, let them play again. If they succeed, they win two sweets. Let this process continue, doubling the prize every time, until the player misses, quits the game to keep their prize, or wins all the sweets!

BIBLE EXPLORATION 10 MINS

You will need: large sheets of paper and pens (or a whiteboard facility on your video calling software); Bibles

Divide the young people into groups of two or three, using breakout rooms as your software allows. Make sure someone in each group has a large sheet of paper, pens and a Bible (or can use the whiteboard feature).

Invite each group to draw a simple outline of a person. This will represent Abram. Let the groups read Genesis 11:26-12:9 and 13:14-18 and write or draw what they find out about Abram, around the outside of their Abram picture. What kind of a person is he? Is there anything that makes him special? What does God promise him and ask him to do?

Next, ask the young people to reflect on what Abram might have been thinking and feeling about what God asked him to do. They can write their ideas on the inside of their Abram figure. Take feedback from each group.

CHATTING TOGETHER 5 MINS

Discuss the following questions together:

- If you were in Abram's position, what would you have done?
- What does this passage tell you about God?
- Can you think of something God might ask you to do that's exciting but a bit scary?
- Has that ever happened to you? If so, can you tell us about it?
- When you know you need to do something big, how can you get past being scared?

CREATIVE RESPONSE 10 MINS

You will need: large sheet of paper; marker pen; slices of lemon (or vinegar); sugar

Ask the group for ten tips on overcoming fear. These might be lessons they've learned from Abram or tricks they've tried themselves. Record their ideas on the paper and throw in one or two of your own if the young people get stuck.

Ask the young people to find a slice of lemon (or vinegar) and some sugar. Invite everyone to find some space, get comfortable and close their eyes. Ask them to suck on their lemon (or dip their finger into the vinegar and taste it) and think about any decision or situation they're facing which is bitter – something that's hard or scary. They can quietly ask God to help them with this situation. Next, let them dip their finger in the sugar and taste that, and reflect on the sweet possibilities for the future – fun and exciting things God might lead them to. They can thank God for these possibilities and ask him to lead them into the future he has planned for them.

PRAYER 5 MINS

Ask the young people to take it in turns to mention one thing coming up which they're excited about. When everyone has done that, ask everyone to pray out loud for another person. Everyone will pray at the same time, and just for a few seconds, so there's no need to feel self-conscious. Next, ask everyone to mention one thing they're worried or upset about. (But if anyone doesn't want to say anything, they don't have to.) Again, ask everyone to pray out loud at the same time.

You can round off with a short prayer of your own, thanking God that he has good plans for our future and asking him to help us overcome any fear we might have about it.

SIMEON WHITING

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God's promise

MEETING AIM

To reflect on the relationship between faith and doubt.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Genesis 15:1-8

BACKGROUND

This session is designed for you to do online in a group video call (on something like Facetime or Zoom). Make sure you have parental permission to do this, as well as following your church's safeguarding procedure.

Abram never doubted God, did he? Well, actually, it looks as though he did. But it's understandable that Abram had a few questions, given how extravagant God's promises were, and how long he had to wait to see those promises fulfilled (the action in chapter 15 happens about ten years after the initial promise in chapter 12). During this session, try to communicate that it's OK to have questions about God and his plans, but what we do with those questions is what matters. In the end, Abram chose to believe God. We should, too.

JOINING THE SESSION 5 MINS

As people join you online, ask them to share what they have been doing during the past seven days. Ask when they last heard a piece of news they just couldn't believe. This might be something they read in a magazine, something a friend shared on social media, or just a tall story someone at school told them. What was it that made this story unbelievable?

INTRO ACTIVITY 10 MINS

Challenge your young people to dig up a few examples of fake news. Give them a few minutes to find and debunk as many rumours, urban myths and dubious news stories as they can. The young people can start by trawling social media or gossip websites for leads (or just thinking of any urban myths they've heard recently). They can then check how credible these stories are by doing an internet search for keywords relating to each article. If no other websites mention the story, it's likely to be a dud. snopes.com is useful for fact-checking, too.

This activity should get your young people thinking about how we know we can trust someone and believe what they say. (And learning some basic fact-checking techniques will help your young people engage with social media wisely.)

BIBLE EXPLORATION 10 MINS

You will need: paper; pens; images of stars from images.nasa.gov

Before the session, visit images.nasa.gov, go to the 'most popular' tab and download a few images of stars. There are some absolutely staggering photos available. Choose some with so many stars, they'd be impossible to count. Share your screen to show the images during this activity.

Divide the young people into groups of about three or four (or work as a whole group). Make sure each group has a Bible, paper and pens. Ask each group to read Genesis 15:1-8 and make two lists: reasons for Abram to believe God's promise and reasons for Abram to doubt. They can base these lists on what they find on the passage itself and on their own ideas. Take feedback from each group.

Then all together discuss verse 5, while looking at the star images. Why does God show Abram the stars at this point? Do you think it makes any difference to whether Abram believes God's promise? If so, how?

CHATTING TOGETHER 5 MINS

Use the following questions as a starting point for a discussion on faith and doubt:

- If you were in Abram's position, what would you have said to God?
- Is it OK to ask God questions? Why / why not?
- How can we be sure God will keep his promises?
- If the promise is for something particularly big, does that make a difference to how likely we are to believe it? If so, how?
- What kinds of things might make us doubt God?
- How can we / should we handle doubt?
- Is there anything we can learn from how Abram behaves in Genesis 15? (He isn't afraid to ask God questions, but ultimately chooses to believe him.)

CREATIVE RESPONSE 10 MINS

You will need: white or yellow card (or paper); scissors; felt-tip pens; Bibles
Make sure everyone has some card and scissors. Ask them to cut out a star shape large enough to write on. Invite them to write or draw something on their star which will encourage them to trust God when it's hard. (For example, they could write: "Abram believed the Lord", "Genesis 15:6" or "Look at the stars".) They can also use the felt-tip pens to decorate their stars. As you work, carry on the conversation about the story and about faith and doubt.

Encourage the young people to leave it somewhere they will see it often (eg stuck to a mirror), to remind them to keep trusting God.

PRAYER 5 MINS

You will need: pens; paper

Make sure everyone has pens and paper. Let the young people reflect on any doubts they might have about God or following Jesus. Invite them to write down something that represents these doubts, and to tell God what is on their minds. When they're ready, they should tear it up, as a sign that they're handing their doubts over to God.

Finish with a short prayer, thanking God that he keeps his promises, and asking him to help us all overcome our doubts.

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A son for Abraham

MEETING AIM

To explore hospitality and how God can speak through visitors.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Genesis 18:1-15

BACKGROUND

This session is designed for you to do online in a group video call (on something like Facetime or Zoom). Make sure you have parental permission to do this, as well as following your church's safeguarding procedure.

In Abraham's culture, hospitality was all-important. Welcoming visitors was the norm, rather than something remarkable. Through extending hospitality to these three strangers, Abraham heard God speak. In a world of lockdown restrictions, people can be isolated and ignored. Showing godly hospitality is surely more important than ever. Perhaps we, too, will hear God speak as we welcome strangers. (By the way, God changed Abram and Sarai's names in the previous chapter. Abram is now Abraham – 'father of many' – underlining God's promise of numerous descendants.)

JOINING THE SESSION 5 MINS

As people join you online, ask them to share what they have been doing during the past seven days. Ask if anyone has had a memorable visitor at home. Someone might have had a celebrity visit them, or has anyone had a visitor who was memorable for all the wrong reasons? .

INTRO ACTIVITY 10 MINS

Prepare a list of questions that will apply to some of the young people, but not all. Try statements like: "Who has been to America?" or "Who has an uncle?" Read the questions out, asking the people who don't have or haven't done that thing to turn their camera off. They can turn it back on for the next question.

After a few questions, comment that being excluded – being the ones with their camera turned off – is not a nice feeling. Choosing to welcome people instead of shutting them out can make a big difference: to us as well as to them.

BIBLE EXPLORATION 10 MINS

You will need: bread; butter; cold cooked meat (and vegetarian alternative); Bibles

Make sure the group has access to bread, butter and cooked meat or cheese. It would fit the theme of the session if you could deliver picnics to the young people before the session (if your budget and local lockdown restrictions allow).

Read Genesis 18:1-15 as a group. Ask particular young people to read the lines for Abraham, Sarah, the visitors, the Lord and the narrator. Invite the group to eat their picnic as they read.

Afterwards, ask the young people what they think Abraham and Sarah might have been thinking and feeling while all this was taking place. Start by asking the young people who read Abraham and Sarah's lines, then throw the discussion open to the whole group. Try to draw out how the visitors made a difference to Abraham and Sarah. (It might help to explain that having children was a really big deal in this culture and that, on the other hand, not being able to have children was seen as highly shameful.)

CHATTING TOGETHER 5 MINS

Use the following questions as a starting point for a discussion:

- Why do you think Abraham was so keen to welcome his visitors?
- Why might showing hospitality to strangers be important (for us as well as for Abraham)?
- Why might that not be an easy thing to do?

CREATIVE RESPONSE 10 MINS

Ask the group to search online for news articles – local, national and international – which highlight individuals or groups of people who need hospitality.

Let the young people read out or summarise some of these news articles and comment on what kinds of people need hospitality. If we were going to offer hospitality to people like these, what might we gain from it? Might God somehow speak through them, as he did through Abraham's visitors? How might that work in our context? What kinds of things can put us off welcoming strangers?

To take practical action based on the content of this session, why not explore making your church a place of welcome for marginalised people (*placesofwelcome.org*)?

PRAYER 5 MINS

You will need: Bible; paper; pens

Let each of the young people find some space and get comfortable. Invite them to close their eyes. Explain that Jesus had a few things to say about welcoming outsiders, too. Here's one particularly memorable story.

Read out Matthew 25:31-40. Read clearly and slowly, pausing between phrases. Encourage the young people to reflect on Jesus' words and how they might apply to us.

Ask everyone to write down the name of a person or group of people who needs to be shown hospitality. Divide the young people into pairs. Ask everyone to pray with their partner for the person or group of people written on their paper. Short, simple prayers are fine. After a couple of minutes, round off with a prayer of your own, asking God to speak to you all as you welcome outsiders in his name. Encourage the group to stick their paper up somewhere and pray for that over the coming week.

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A wife for Isaac

MEETING AIM

To discuss wise relationship choices.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Genesis 24

BACKGROUND

This session is designed for you to do online in a group video call (on something like Facetime or Zoom). Make sure you have parental permission to do this, as well as following your church's safeguarding procedure.

Times have changed over the last 4,000 years and so have prevailing attitudes towards women. Having your dad send a servant to find a woman for you to marry would be an unusual courtship technique these days and fortunately, women tend to get more say in the matter now. But choosing wisely when it comes to romantic relationships is just as important for us as it was for Isaac. .

JOINING THE SESSION

5 MINS

As people join you online, ask them to share what they have been doing during the past seven days. Ask everyone what they look for in a potential boyfriend or girlfriend.

INTRO ACTIVITY

10 MINS

You will need: magazines; glue sticks; scissors; paper

Invite the young people to create a picture of their ideal boyfriend or girlfriend, either drawing them, or using photos and text from magazines or newspapers and sticking them to a sheet of paper. Encourage them to think beyond physical appearance: what elements of someone's personality or character make them attractive?

BIBLE EXPLORATION

10 MINS

You will need: Bibles; large sheet of paper; marker pen

If you have a large group, divide them into groups of four or five for this activity, using breakout rooms. Ask the young people to look up Genesis 24. Challenge each group to create a photo story of the events in

the chapter. They should work together to agree what moments from the story they want to capture, then create the tableau and screenshot their screens.

Invite the group(s) to show their photos, with one representative sharing their screen.

Next, ask if anyone has any thoughts about how this story compares with modern dating. And is there anything we can learn from this about wise choices in relationships? (Look for general principles, rather than: "Get your mate to find someone nice and stick her on his camel.")

Give the discussion a little more focus now. Ask the group to suggest five 'dos' and five 'don'ts' for relationships, based on Genesis 24. Record their answers on a large sheet of paper. If the young people come up with more than five answers for either side, ask them to choose the five answers they think are most helpful.

If the group seem short on answers, suggest one or two yourself. For example: listen to the people who know you best (Isaac's dad has his say in verses 1-9), ask God what he thinks (verses 12-14), character is important (look how willing Rebekah is to help in verses 17-20).

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Use these questions to guide a discussion:

- Why does it matter that we choose wisely when we decide to start a relationship with someone?
- Do you believe in 'the one': one single person you're meant to be with? Why / why not?
- What do you think God might say about it? Does he have a plan for your love life?
- What if you end up single? How might that have advantages?

Bear in mind that reading a biblical story which apparently includes a woman being coerced into marriage might raise some very difficult questions. If the young people ask questions about why the Bible endorses women being treated as property (for example), be willing to take these questions seriously. It might help to mention that Isaac's culture was very different from ours. There's still godly wisdom in Genesis 24, but it is not OK to objectify women. (Or men, for that matter.)

CREATIVE RESPONSE

10 MINS

You will need: pictures from 'Intro activity'

Ask if anyone has ever heard the advice: "Become the person the person you're looking for is looking for." (The provenance of this line is unclear, but it's often attributed to Andy Stanley.)

Ask the young people to look at the pictures they created earlier, which illustrated what they look for in a boyfriend / girlfriend. Encourage them to apply these ideas to themselves. What if, instead of just looking for someone else who's wise, kind and patient, we focused on becoming wiser, kinder and more patient ourselves? That way, we'll all become more mature, more godly, more attractive people, regardless of who we end up dating. (Or if we end up single, which can be an extremely rich and fulfilling life.)

Allow a few minutes for the young people to reflect on the characteristics they highlighted as desirable in a partner, and how they might apply these characteristics to themselves.

PRAYER

5 MINS

Finish with a simple, response-based prayer. After each line the leader reads, the whole group should join in with the response: "God of love, help us."

Lord God, you show us what real love means. Help us to learn.

God of love, help us.

To always treat other people with respect, regardless of their gender...

God of love, help us.

To see a person's character, before their appearance...

God of love, help us.

To listen to the people who know us best, even if we don't like what they're saying...

God of love, help us.

To understand that we are loved completely, whether we're in a relationship or not...

God of love, help us.

To follow your leading in everything...

God of love, help us.

Amen.

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