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Our Mission:

At Youth Ministry Conversations, we believe you know your group best. This means our resources look a little different than what you may have experienced in the past. We try and create a “buffet” of material so you can choose and pick what works best for your group. You will find ideas, instructions, and possibilities in this packet all related to the theme of “The Life of the First Family.” How you use them, and how you structure your study is up to you. We hope you enjoy this resource and return in the future to check out other materials.

This Study:

Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and other Abrahamic traditions see Abraham as a founding father of faith. Why? What’s so important about Abraham? Students will use this six week study to answer those questions and learn about the lives of Abraham, his wife Sarah, and his sons Ishmael and Isaac. They will also learn about what it means to live faithful lives and why we see Abraham as a father and role model for our faith.

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The Writers:



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Called to Be a Blessing: God's Call on Abram

Focus: Students learn that like Abram, they are called by God to be a blessing to others. God blesses and does not give up on them, even when they make mistakes. What if they took God's approach to being in a relationship with them in their relationship with the world?

Scripture:

- Genesis 12:1-9

Supplies:

- Bibles
- Pens/Markers
- Various jars, bowls, containers for Penny Jars game
- Pennies
- Tape (will be used on the floor)
- Two pieces of paper (or half pieces) for each student for the prayer activity
- A copy of the "Blessing" prayer for each student (optional)
- A tray of various things like office supplies, random things around the youth room or office, etc.
- Scrap pieces of paper or if you have notebooks for students for the tray activity
- Volunteer to carry the tray of items around to the youth
- A room or place where your volunteer can hide from the youth during the question part of the tray activity
- A mirror per small group

Background on scripture and topic:

With Abram's story, we transition from a primal history of the world's origins (Genesis 1-11) to stories about Israel's earliest ancestors, starting with Abram in Genesis 12. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and other Abrahamic traditions see Abram (God gives him the name change to Abraham in chapter 17) as a founding father of faith. Today's lesson is about the first encounter we have with

Abram in the Hebrew scriptures. What's interesting is that we know nothing of his credentials for why God calls him to leave his homeland and go. We find him at this crossroads (the city he is called from, *Haran*, means "highway" or "crossroads")¹ where he goes out and receives God's blessing in order that he may be a blessing to others and be a great nation. Blessing in this sense is to wish good would happen to a person.

Sometimes we don't realize how costly, responding and obeying this call was for Abram. He will be separated from his family group, his social network, to go to the unknown. He will have to give up his source of protection and identity to obey God's call.² It's a big ask that God is making of Abram.

Today's lesson focuses on God's calling on Abram to be a blessing to others and how we share in that calling. God blesses us with different gifts, and we are called to bless others by sharing our gifts and God's love with them. We can choose to live generously and be that blessing or be a curse and hurt others.

Parent email prompt:

Tomorrow, we will start studying the life of Abraham and his family. We will focus on Genesis 12:1-9, when God calls Abram (his original name before God gives him his new name "Abraham" in chapter 17) at a crossroads to leave his homeland in order to be a blessing to others. How can we live out that calling in our lives today?

Text prompt the night before:

Tomorrow, we will start studying the life of Abraham and his family. How do we share in Abraham's blessing? Come find out!

¹ Donald P. Olsen, "Pastoral Perspective of Genesis 12:1-4a," in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A*, vol. II, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 52.

² Carol A. Newsom, "Exegetical Perspective of Genesis 12:1-4a," in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A*, vol. II, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 53.

Game: Penny Jars

Before the game: Gather various jars, containers, or bowls into which students will throw pennies. You will need at least two pennies per player with some extra (though you may use other coins if desired). You will also need to make different lines on the floor with tape to note different throwing distances.

Note: The supplies needed for this game depend on how many students or groups you will have. As students will “get out” and stop playing if they miss a throw, you don’t want the game to last too long so those students won’t get bored. If you have a smaller group, you might be good with one jar and have a back-up jar with a smaller opening in case you have some awesome penny-throwers. Or you can place a few jars out to give your students more of a chance of making their throws. If you have a larger group, you might need to set up a few game stations and play tournament-style.

During the game: The basic idea is that students are throwing pennies in jars from different lines on the floor (like the game of “Horse” in basketball). Start the group at the first line closest to the jar. If a student’s penny lands in a jar, the student gets two more pennies to throw from the next line. They move to the next line from the jars for as many lines as needed. If a student makes the throw again, they get two more pennies to throw. The furthest line should be across the room from the jars, and if you need more of a variation for the group, you can change jars to one that has a smaller opening to make it more difficult.

Connection to the lesson: If students already know the topic of today’s lesson, ask if they see any ways the game might relate to the lesson topic. In order to get more pennies to throw, they had to give up the ones they had. God blesses us with gifts in order that we may share them with others.

Prayer Time: A Beginning for Others

God’s calling on Abram happened at a crossroads in his life. It marked a new beginning for him as he went to a new land, and he was given a calling to be a blessing or a bringer of good to others. His calling was for him to be an agent of new beginnings for others out of God’s love.

Pass out pens and pieces of paper (or half pieces of paper) to your students. You might want some soft background music playing as students will spend some time in reflection. On one side of a page, ask them to think about different ways they are a blessing to others and write those ways down. They could involve gifts God has given them or ways they help other people. On the other side of that page, ask students to think of ways they have hurt other people through their words, actions, or inaction and write those ways down.

After a few minutes of reflection, ask students to turn to the other piece of paper. Tell them this paper is a new beginning. In the spirit of Abram, students may think of and write down ways they might bless the people they have hurt or people that may not have first come to their minds. Maybe they can think of new ways they might be a blessing to others or ways they might create new beginnings for others.

To close this time of prayer, pray “Blessing” from Sharlande Sledge’s *Prayers and Litanies for the Christian Seasons*.³ You may even want to print out a copy for each student to take home:

“Blessing”

Go...to be a beginning for others -
to be a singer to the songless,
a storyteller to the wanderer;
to become a beginning of hope for the despairing,
of healing for the hurting,
of assurance for the doubting,
of reconciliation for the divided.

Go forth believing in beginnings,
making beginnings, being beginnings
so that you may not just grow old
but grow new each day of this amazing life
God calls us to live with each other.

³ Sharlande Sledge, *Prayers and Litanies for the Christian Seasons* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 1999), 16.

In the name of the God of ages past,
who makes all things new,
so we can remember yesterday,
dream of tomorrow,
and live in God's love today.

Activity: Tray of Focus

Before the activity: Set-up a tray of various items out of sight from your youth. These can be office items, youth room random objects, or anything else you would like. You might already want to have a volunteer ready for this activity and explain their task to them, or you can pick a volunteer during the lesson.

During the activity: Hand out pens and scrap pieces of paper to students. Tell them to pay close attention and maybe take notes on the tray as it is displayed by your volunteer as you will ask them questions about the tray. Have the volunteer walk the tray around the group. After 30 seconds or a walk around the group, your volunteer will disappear from the room while you ask the students questions.

For the first two questions, ask about something on the tray, like the color of the stapler or how many paper clips were on the tray. Then ask at least two questions about the volunteer that passed the tray around like the brand of shoes they are wearing, or if they were wearing a watch or necklace. Students should be able to easily answer questions about the tray, but it will be more difficult to answer the questions about the volunteer as they were focused on the items on the tray.

Connection to the lesson: We can easily be so focused on one thing that we miss other things or even people around us. Part of being a blessing to others is to be open to possibilities to bless other people, even going out of our way to look for ways we might be a blessing.

Scripture Reading: Before reading, explain to the students the transition being made in this chapter from the world's origin stories to stories of Israel's ancestors from the background section. Remind students that Abraham is still known as "Abram" in the story for today's lesson. Have a student read aloud Genesis 12:1-9 to the group. Other students may follow along in their Bibles.

Large group discussion questions:

- What surprised you in this story? What challenged you?
- In what ways do you think obeying God's call would affect Abram and his family? What positive ways? Negative ways?
 - You may want to share with students some information from the background section of how it would negatively impact him and his family if they don't bring it up.
- How do you think Abram and his family felt after receiving this calling?
- Why do you think Abram obeyed this calling?
- Why do you think God gave Abram this calling and blessing?

Small group discussion questions:

- What do you learn about God from our story?
- What do you learn about Abram and his family from our story?
- How does this story speak to us?

Small group activity: Give each small group a mirror to pass around their group or have them take turns standing in front of a mirror. Ask students to take a moment to look at themselves in the mirror. Share with the students that Abram was called to serve as a mirror.⁴ He was to reflect the blessing God gives him to others, not be a judge of others. How can we serve as a mirror of God's blessing? How might we reflect God's love?

Tangible item they leave with: Plans for how they will be a blessing from the prayer activity. If you decided to print out the prayer for your students to take home, make sure they have that too.

⁴ James McTyre, "Homiletical Perspective of Genesis 12:1-4a," in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A*, vol. II, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 51-55.

Remind youth:

They are blessed and so loved by God. God doesn't give up on them. What would it look like if they viewed others in the world from God's point of view of them? They are blessed in order to be a blessing to others, and may they live open to this calling and how they may carry it out to be bringers of new beginnings. Encourage them that you will continue this conversation in the next lesson.