

## BEFORE YOU TEACH

### Pray for Students

As you prepare this session, think of the people in your group and the difficulties they may be facing. Pray specifically for them. Be sure to ask for prayer requests before closing in prayer. This will foster trust and intimacy between you and your learners.

### Study the Context

This week's Scripture passage is part of a detailed story. Make sure you read all of Genesis 16 and 17. Use commentaries, Bible dictionaries, and other tools to develop an overview of Abram and Sarai's decision to take matters into their own hands and not trust God to do what He promised.

### LOOK BACK

Briefly provide a review of last week's session. Direct learner's attention to the "Live It" application points (p. 75). Ask: "What role did your faith in Christ play in how you handled any event that may have impacted your life?" Allow learners to share their experiences and discuss the difficulty in trusting God when you don't have all the answers.

## TEACHING PLAN

### INTRODUCTION

Prior to learners' entering the room, write the following quote by Milton Berle on the board: "If opportunity doesn't knock, build a door."

**DISCUSS:** Allow learners to discuss their thoughts about Milton Berle's quote.

**SAY:** "This catchy quote is meant to encourage you to make your own way in life when the way doesn't open up for you." Explain that Abram and Sarai may have felt the same way. God had promised Abram that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky ten years earlier. Common to us, ten years can seem like a lifetime. Situations like this can tempt us take matters into

our own hands and act against God's will for us. The outcome will not be what is expected.

**TRANSITION:** Read **The Point:** "Trust God to redeem your failures" and **The Question:** "What can we learn from failure about trust in God?" to transition into this lesson.

### DIG INTO THE TEXT

#### Don't Take Over // Genesis 16:1-5

**OBJECT LESSON:** Use the "Object Lesson" (p. 148) to demonstrate the difficulty of waiting.

**ASK:** "Why do we find it so difficult to wait?"

**READ:** Invite a learner to read Genesis 16:1-5.

**GUIDE:** Use the commentary (p. 148) to explain the setting of Genesis 16. Point out that again Abram's faith was tested. Ten years had passed, and God's promise was still yet to come. Waiting became difficult so Abram and Sarai devised an alternate plan. This plan was not made in faith but in an effort to help God fulfill His promise.

**ASK:** "Why is it so difficult to wait for God's timing?"

**DISCUSS:** Use the paragraphs on pages 78-79 to lead learners to discuss each character's role in taking the matter into their own hands. Discuss Sarai's insecurity, Abram's lack of faith, and Hagar's pride in the situation.

**ASK:** "Have you ever gone ahead of God's plan for you and followed your own plan? What was the outcome?"

**EXPLAIN:** Point out that verses 1-5 give us a picture of real life. Abram and Sarai were ordinary people with hope, dreams, and fears that we all experience. They wanted a child more than anything else. Just like us, they felt their time was running out. They were unwilling to wait on the Lord, and they chose their own way. Because they leaned to their own understanding, the result of their decision left them with a home full of pain and strife. They had no idea their decision would

## THE POINT: TRUST GOD TO REDEEM YOUR FAILURES.

impact generations to come. Use the commentary (pp. 148-149) to reinforce these highlights.

### Do What God Expects

// Genesis 17:1-3

**READ:** Invite a learner to read Genesis 17:1-3.

**RECAP:** Use the paragraph that begins “Thirteen years passed between ...” (p. 79) to transition into Genesis 17.

**GUIDE:** Use the commentary (p. 149) to point out that again, God reaffirmed His covenant with Abram. Explain that with blessing comes responsibility. God instructed Abram to live in His presence and be blameless. Point out that to be blameless doesn’t mean “sinless.” It means to be single-hearted, fully devoted to the Lord. (See also “Keyword” (p. 77).

**PACK ITEM:** Distribute **Pack Item 11: “Biblical Covenants”** handout. Provide an overview of the information. Ask learners: “Why do you think covenants are important to God? to us?”

**EXPLAIN:** Point out that our God is a covenant-making God. But He is also a covenant-keeping God. Covenant-making is a way to hold both parties accountable to a specific agreement. Covenant-keeping describes the energy it takes to sustain the perspective terms of the agreement. Like God, we must become covenant-keepers.

**ASK:** Lead learners to discuss the following: “How has God challenged you to a higher level of obedience as He blesses you? How has God shown Himself as God Almighty in your life?”

**EXPLAIN:** Use the commentary for verse 3 (p. 149) to show that Abram’s falling face down showed reverence and humility. It was a full expression of his willingness to obey God.

### God Can Restore Us

// Genesis 17:4-9

**READ:** Invite a learner to read Genesis 17:4-9.

**SUMMARIZE:** Use the commentary (p. 149) to set the context for this passage. Point out how God

reaffirmed His promise with Abram and now would establish His covenant with him.

**RECAP:** Invite a learner to read the paragraph that begins “God previously ...” (p. 80) to explain the new covenant God made with Abram. Explain that God changed Abram’s name to Abraham and Sarai’s name to Sarah (v. 15).

**ASK:** “How does knowing that God’s covenant with us is solely dependent on Him and His grace impact your faith?”

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Invite a learner to read “Digging Deeper” (p. 79). Use this section and the paragraph that begins “When Jesus came ...” (p. 81) to further explain what God’s covenant means for us. Ask the question that follows.

**DISCUSS:** Lead learners to discuss the significance of changing Abram’s name. Explain that to encourage Abram’s faith in the promise, God changed Abram’s (exalted father) name to Abraham (father of many nations) and repeated the promise again, reminding Abraham that it is a permanent possession given by a permanent covenant. (Refer to the commentary [p. 149].)

**GUIDE:** Ask learners: “What names has God given believers throughout Scripture?” Remind learners of names like saints, royal priesthood, chosen, righteous, disciple, beloved, the elect, and so forth. Explain that like Abraham, we receive these names because of the finished work of Jesus Christ through salvation.

**DID YOU KNOW?:** Use “Did You Know?” to provide an example of redemption just as Abram was redeemed. Ask the question that follows.



**PACK ITEM 11**

## CLOSE THE SESSION

Draw learner's attention to the "Live It" session summary (p. 81). Invite a learner to read the question and the paragraph. Encourage learners take time this week to work through the "Live It" application points. Challenge them to remain faithful to God because no matter how we have failed, God is faithful to forgive us and He will continue to work in our lives. Encourage learners to spend time this week reflecting on failures and how God has used them to strengthen their faith.

**PRAY:** Close in prayer, giving thanks to God for His unfailing love and plan of redemption for our lives through His Son Jesus Christ.

## OBJECT LESSON

Bring a stopwatch or a kitchen timer to class. If you don't have one, use the clock app on your smart phone or electronic device.

**GUIDE:** Set the timer for two minutes. Ask learners to sit quietly and wait for the two minutes to end. When the time is up, ask learners to share their thoughts while the timer was running. Discuss why it's so hard to wait patiently. Lead learners to discuss why it's easy to take matters into our own hands when we don't wait on God to fulfill His promises.

**EXPLAIN:** Point out that waiting on God can be difficult. But we receive encouragement and strength to wait the closer we walk with God and the more we know Him. We will trust the outcome because we know the results will be favorable.



## COMMENTARY

### GENESIS 16:1-5

**Verse 1.** Sarai was now seventy-five years old, and she was barren. She knew God's promises to Abram depended on the conception of a child in her womb, or did they? After all, God promised Abram would have innumerable descendants, but did that necessarily mean God's promise would be fulfilled through her? She "owned an Egyptian slave named Hagar." Perhaps God could fulfill His promises some other way?

**Verse 2.** A custom or practice that is legal may not be moral, and that was certainly the case in Sarai's suggestion that Abram have relations with Hagar so that Sarai could build a family through her. It was not unusual for a slave to become a concubine in Old Testament times. It was especially common when the wife was barren. But it was not God's design in marriage for a man to have more than one wife (Gen. 2:24). However, God is gracious, and He would show grace to all involved. Sarai justified her suggestion to Abram by saying, "The LORD has prevented me from bearing children." Abram agreed to Sarai's suggestion, so it is clear they are both to blame for what they did.

**Verse 3.** Sarai gave her Egyptian slave to Abram "as a wife for him." Abram thought God would keep His promise through his heir Eliezer, but that was not to be, so Abram took Hagar as a wife according to the custom of the day. Abram would have to learn once again that earthly wisdom leads to jealousy and selfishness (Jas. 3:14-16). If Abram had sought wisdom from God, he would have received it (1:5).

**Verse 4.** Abram "slept with Hagar, and she became pregnant." Sarai's plan worked, but she was not rejoicing. The success of her scheming made her miserable because Hagar now looked on Sarai with contempt.

**Verse 5.** Sarai blamed Abram for what happened. Even though it was Sarai's idea for

Abram to take Hagar as a wife. Of course, Abram did bear some responsibility too. He went along with Sarai's plan, and there is no indication he sought the Lord about it. Sarai said, "May the LORD judge between me and you." Since she had already judged Abram, she was confident which way the Lord would judge.

## **GENESIS 17:1-3**

**Verse 1.** Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran (Gen. 12:4). He was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born (16:16). Thirteen years after Ishmael was born, at the age of ninety-nine, the Lord appeared to Abram again. This time, God said, "I am God Almighty." Why had God waited until now to reveal Himself by this name? Abram had waited and waited for God to keep His promise to make him a great nation with many descendants (12:2,7;15:4,18). Now God was going to keep His promise and would show Abram that the Lord is indeed almighty.

God instructed Abram to live in His presence and be "blameless." It was not a call to be sinless. Rather, Abram was called to live with integrity, to walk without blame before God and others.

**Verse 2.** God reaffirmed His covenant with Abram. He promised again that He would bless Abram. God said, "I will multiply you greatly." The genuine offspring of Abram would be like him. They would have his faith and not just be his physical descendants.

**Verse 3.** Some Christians today bow their heads in worship; others lift their hands in worship. Abram fell facedown, showing humility and reverence. Of course, it's not the position of one's head or hands that indicates true worship; it's the position of one's heart. As Abram lay prostrate, "God spoke with him."

## **GENESIS 17:4-9**

**Verse 4.** God said "as for me" in reference to the covenant. In Genesis 17:4-8, God explained His part in the covenant. In Genesis 17:9, God said,

"As for you," and then explained Abram's role. God made several promises to Abram as part of the covenant. God first promised Abram he would become the "father of many nations." God would make Ishmael into a great nation, but God would not establish His covenant with him (Gen. 17:20-21). The covenant would be confirmed through Abraham's son, Isaac (v. 21).

**Verse 5.** A significant change would soon take place in Abram's life, and God indicated it by changing Abram's name. The name Abram means "exalted father." God changed Abram's name to Abraham because, as God said, "I will make you the father of many nations."

**Verse 6.** God then told Abraham that He would make him "extremely fruitful." That meant he would have numerous descendants. "Nations and kings" would come from him. The fulfillment of this covenant would take place through Isaac, since God would confirm His covenant with him (17:21).

**Verse 7.** As in verse 2, God told Abram that He would "confirm my covenant that is between me and you," but God now affirmed that it would also be "a permanent covenant" with Abraham's descendants. God would command Abraham and all of his male offspring to be circumcised, and it is said to be a sign of "a permanent covenant" (v. 13).

**Verse 8.** God also said He would give to Abraham and his descendants "the land where you are residing." God would provide all the land of Canaan, and God said it would be "a permanent possession," and He would be "their God." The word "offspring" is a collective singular, which means it can refer to either a single item or a group. Christ is the greatest fulfillment of the promises to Abraham. Those who belong to Christ are Abraham's descendants.

**Verse 9.** It was essential for Abraham and his offspring to keep God's covenant, and those who are "in Christ" are part of that covenant. We have a covenant-keeping God who is creating a people from every "nation, tribe, people, and language" (Rev. 7:9), who come to Him by faith, the same faith of our father Abraham.

# INTRODUCING 1 JOHN

(Continued from page 30)

The gospel commandment “love one another” (John 13:34) is repeated five times in 1 John: 3:11,23; 4:7,11,12.<sup>11</sup>

In his attempt to correct these heresies, John set forth a series of tests for authentic Christianity. These tests can be grouped and counted in various ways, but there are at least 25 of them. They are imbedded throughout the 105 verses. Obviously, their intent was not simply to test, but to bring assurance to the true Christians. Two literary formulas were used to introduce the tests: 1] conditional sentences—for example, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us,” (1:8, RSV) (1:5-10, also 2:3; 4:12; 5:2); and 2] relative clauses—for example, “He who says ‘I know him’ but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (2:4-11,23; 3:8,10,17; 4:6-8,15,16,20; 5:1,4,10,12).<sup>12</sup> A close scrutiny of these passages clearly shows the two primary tests of authenticity are believing that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God and loving one another. At least 11 have to do with believing in Jesus and at least 15 with loving/hating a brother.<sup>13</sup>

One should also consider 1 John’s vocabulary. Three words have special prominence: love, know, and abide.<sup>14</sup> Love, as a noun, verb, and adjective, occurs 52 times. We have already seen its importance. Know<sup>15</sup> occurs a total of 40 times. Since the word *gnostic* comes from the Greek word for “knowledge,” John may well have emphasized this word with a pointed irony. While discounting those who claim to know but do not, he gave full assurance that one can “know him.” Such was in fact the purpose of the letter: “I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life” (5:13, RSV).

“Abide” appears 25 times in the 105 verses and perhaps serves as the dominant metaphor for the letter. It was used with both major themes of the letter: doctrine (4:15) and ethics (3:6,9,24). Perhaps echoing chapter 15 of John’s gospel, the “abide” metaphor in this letter was his favorite

term for the believer’s life in Christ.<sup>16</sup>

First John 3:23-24 summarizes the letter well, with its stress on believing and loving and its metaphor of the mutual abiding of the believer and Christ.

1 Thus John fulfilled Jesus’ request from the cross that John care for Mary in His absence. See John 19:26-27.

2 Thomas D. Lea, *The New Testament: Its Background and Message* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1966), 156-157. Most evangelical scholars agree with this time frame.

3 Everything about 1 John, its vocabulary, style of writing, theology, emphasis on love, gives evidence that it was written by the same author as the Gospel of John and that it was written within a few years following the appearance of John’s Gospel.

4 This would likely include some of those addressed in Revelation 2-3, with Ephesus at the center.

5 Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of James, The Anchor Bible, Vol. 30* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1982), 757-759. In three pages of fine print Brown listed linguistic and thematic parallels between 1 John and the Gospel of John.

6 Brown, 35.

7 Ignatius, *To the Trallians*, 9:1-2.

8 For a discussion of Cerinthus’ provenance, see B. G. Wright, III, *Cerinthus Apud Hippolytus: An Inquiry into the Traditions about Cerinthus’ Provenance*, *The Second Century* 4.2 (1984): 103-115.

Eusebius reported that John once fled naked from a bathhouse in Ephesus when he heard that Cerinthus had come in and was under the same roof with him. See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III.28.

9 W. T. Connor, *The Epistles of John*, second revised edition. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1957), 3.

10 Compare Matthew 22:34--40; Mark 12:28-31; John 6:29; 13:34-35; 15:12.

11 See also Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-31.

12 In the Greek text one would break down these formulas differently. For the English text these two patterns are the most useful.

13 Robert Law, *The Tests of Life*, third edition. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914; Baker reprint, 1968). Law used the tests of 1 John to explain both the literary structure and the major teachings of the letter.

14 A helpful exercise in reading 1 John might be to color each occurrence of these words, using a different color for each of the three.

15 This includes both Greek words here used for “know,” *ginosko* and *oida*.

16 See especially 2:24; 4:12-16.

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