

Living the Word: Teaching Youth God's Story

Narrative Lectionary, Year 3

God's Promise to Abram

Genesis 15:1-6

Lesson #3-2

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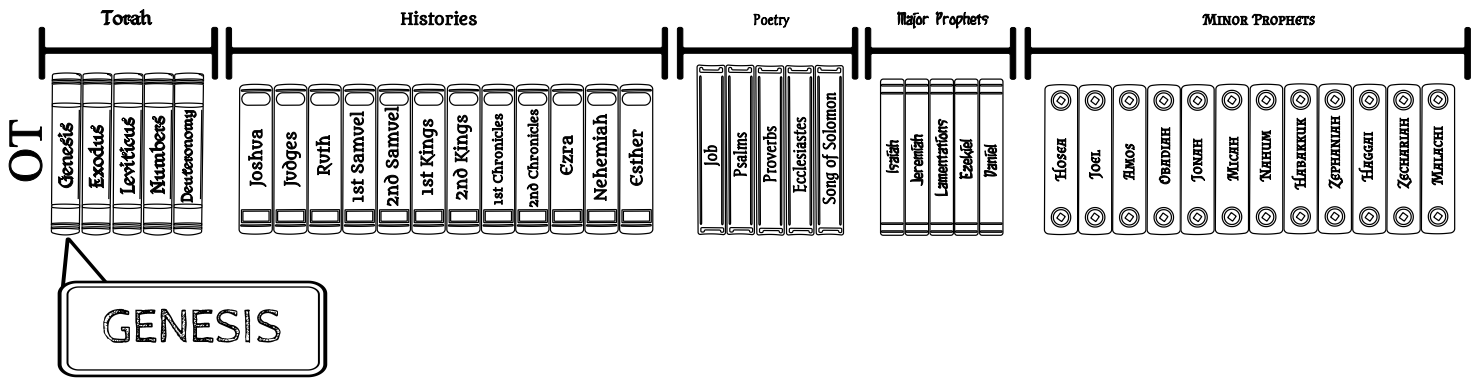
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God's Promise to Abram

Genesis 15:1-6

We continue to see God's loving provision for humanity through God's calling of one man, Abram. God makes Abram a huge and wonderful promise. And Abram trusts that God will carry it out!

Story Connections

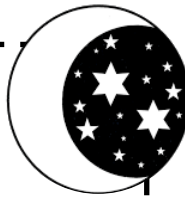
Our story "zooms in" from the macro look at God's care for the whole earth to God's care for and interaction with one person and family. The first humans were unfaithful to God's calling and wandered away. But Abram responds to God's huge promise of blessing with faithfulness and trust.

Story Summary

This week's story focuses in on God's relationship with Abram, whom God calls to take a very special place in God's

Lesson @ A Glance

#3-2: God's Promise to Abram
(Genesis 15:1-6)



The Point: God's love for humanity is shown through God's specific care for us as individuals, communities, and families.

Making Connections: Promises Made, Promises Broken

Spiritual Practice Emphasis:
Fellowship

Bible Nuts and Bolts: Origin Stories

redemptive plans for all people. Unlike Adam and Eve, Abram listens to God and chooses to trust even when he does not entirely understand the fullness of God's vision or how it will be brought about.

In chapter 15, we see God coming to Abram and reassuring him, in a vision, of God's ongoing protection and provision. This promise seems to make Abram bold enough to confess his doubts to God about how the promise will be carried out. He reminds God that he does not yet have any direct descendants. God then points the night sky out to Abram and makes him an astonishing promise: that his offspring will be as

numerous as the stars in the heavens. It is an amazing promise, one that would no doubt be difficult to believe, but Abram does. He trusts in God and in God's ability to carry out that promise. God, in turn, counts Abram's trust as righteousness. In other words, Abram is in right relationship with God.

The Point

God's love for humanity is shown through God's specific care for us as individuals, communities, and families.

God's love for humanity is not some vague or general principle, but is active and worked out in the lives of individuals,

families, and communities. We see that today as God calls Abram into a relationship that will not just bless Abram but eventually the whole world.

"He brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he believed the LORD, and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness."

Genesis 15:5-6

For Your Reflection:

1. *Have you ever been invited by God to do something difficult or to enter into a calling you did not fully see or understand? How did you respond?*
2. *How can you help youth to respond to God with faithfulness and trust even when circumstances might make them fearful or uncertain?*

Bible Nuts & Bolts: Origin Stories

Genesis is all about beginnings. The stories of Genesis are the "back stories" that help us to unlock and understand everything else in the Bible.

Spiritual Practice: Fellowship

Today we focus on God's call to Abram and on the way that Abram, in faith and trust, responds to that call and enters into a relationship, or fellowship, with God.

Core Elements

Into the Story

5 min. › Digital camera with zoom feature

Zooming in for the Close-Up

Look at photographs in close-up as our story moves from macro to micro.

+Learning the Story

15 min. › Bibles
› Star stickers

A Very Big Promise

Listen for the “call and response” dialogue between God and Abram.

+Living the Story

20 min. › Activity Sheet #3-2.A

Standing on the Promises

Speak God’s promises to each other.

Short on time?

Items marked +

can be adjusted to be done with what you probably already have in your pocket or classroom.

Extending the Learning:

Hands On <i>Our Shield</i> Create a shield with a coat of arms for the church community.	20 min.	› Poster paper › Markers or paints
Mixed Media <i>So Many Stars</i> Marvel at the many stars in the heavens.	10 min.	› Internet-connected device
+The Competitive Edge <i>You Can Count On It</i> Play a relay game that involves different types of counting.	20 min.	› Play a relay game that involves different types of counting
Simply Serving <i>Protection for Wanderers</i> Plan a blanket drive for those in need of protection and shelter this winter.	15 min.	› Information on homeless shelter or refugee group
+Worship Connection <i>Amen to That!</i> Lead a call and response time for the congregation.	10-15 min.	› Activity Sheet #3-2.A › Paper › Pens or pencils
Sending the Story	5 min.	› Battery-operated tea lights

Into the Story:

Zooming in for the Close-Up (5 minutes)

Look at photographs in close-up as our story zooms from macro to micro.

DURING CLASS:

1. As students arrive, have them arrange themselves for a group photo. Once everyone has arrived, snap a picture of the entire group. If you want, take one “serious” photo and one silly one!
2. Look together at the photo of the entire group. Then zoom in on each individual in the photo. Then zoom in even further on certain details such as faces or certain background features.
3. **Last week we looked at the big picture of God’s creation of the world and the first human beings. This week we are going to zoom in for a close-up look at God’s call to one man, Abram. We’ll see if Abram’s response to God is similar or different from the response we saw the first man and woman make last week.**

Supplies:

- › Digital camera with zoom feature

Learning the Story:

A Very Big Promise (15 minutes)

Listen for the “call and response” dialogue between God and Abram.

DURING CLASS:

1. Pass out Bibles.
2. **Like last week, today’s story is from the first book of the Bible, Genesis. Our passage today is short but important. In it, God calls a man named Abram to trust God to keep a very big promise.**
3. Although the passage is short, it contains a lot of dialogue. Have students read through the passage silently first and mark places of speech and action (on God’s part and on Abram’s) with star stickers.
4. Next have them read the text aloud with one student reading God’s lines, one reading Abram’s, and another narrating. This exercise should help give them a sense of the “call and response” in the passage, highlighting both God’s promise and Abram’s trust in God.
5. **When God first speaks to Abram, what does Abram do in reply?** *(He asks a question and expresses a worry)* **What is Abram worried about?** *(He is worried that he has no child and therefore no heir; his heir will have to be one of his servants, not his own child)* **What does God tell him in reply?** *(God promises that he will have an heir who will be his own child; God further promises that Abram’s descendants will be as numerous as the stars!)*
6. **God promised Abram something that must have been difficult to believe, especially given Abram’s current circumstances. Yet Abram trusts that God will deliver on the promise.**

Supplies:

- › Bibles
- › Star stickers

Living the Story:

Standing on the Promises (20 minutes)

Speak God's promises to each other.

BEFORE CLASS:

1. Make copies of Activity Sheet #3-2.A for each youth.

Supplies:

› Activity Sheet #3-2.A

DURING CLASS:

1. For this fellowship activity, invite students into a time of sharing. Have them sit in a circle and reflect on the following questions together.
2. **Has there ever been a time when you felt called to trust God? Have you ever felt called to do something hard that felt impossible without God's help? What are some ways we can encourage each other to keep our eyes on our promise-keeping God when circumstances might make us want to doubt?**
3. Provide opportunities for youth to share as they feel comfortable.
4. Draw sharing time to a close by handing out Activity Sheet #3-2.A. Invite students to take turns reading the Scriptural promises aloud. Since some of the promises fit a specific need (forgiveness, peace, rest) invite students who feel a particular need to receive the promises spoken over them by the rest of the group. This will give youth opportunities both to speak promises to others and to receive them themselves.

Hands On: Our Shield (20 minutes)

Create a shield with a coat of arms for the church community.

BEFORE CLASS:

1. Think about stories or symbols that are important to your church community. These might include symbols students see regularly in the church building or stories that have been important in the life of the congregation. Thinking about this beforehand will help you to encourage the youth as they brainstorm ideas for the shield. Encourage them to come up with ideas on their own, but offer them some starter ideas as prompts if necessary.

Supplies:

- › Poster paper
- › Markers or paints

DURING CLASS:

1. **In our passage today, God told Abram that God would be his shield. A shield provides protection in battle. In many places and times, a shield had symbols on it to show the allegiances of the person carrying it.**
2. Bring out poster paper and art supplies.
3. **Today we are going to create a shield for our church community. We are going to draw a coat of arms on it with symbols that remind us of who we are and who we belong to.**
4. Help students come up with ideas for the coat of arms on the shield. These might include pictures or symbols from banners or windows in your church building, specific Christian symbols, or pictures connected to stories from Scripture that have been important in the life of the congregation.
5. Allow students time to create the shield together. Then present it to the congregation so that it can be placed in a shared space for the whole congregation to enjoy. The students might also want to write up a brief description of why they chose the symbols they did, which can be placed near the shield.

Mixed Media: So Many Stars (10 minutes)

Marvel at the many stars in the heavens.

DURING CLASS:

Supplies

> Internet-connected device

1. **God promised Abram that his descendants would be as many as the stars in the heavens. The descendants God promised were all the people who would have faith in God just as Abram did – including you and me!**
2. Go to the “Astronomy Picture of the Day” website at <http://apod.nasa.gov/apod/astropix.html>.
3. **It is now estimated that there might be as many as 100 billion stars just in our galaxy. Our God has created a vast and amazing universe! On a clear night in the desert, Abram probably saw hundreds if not thousands of stars.**
4. Enter “stars” in the website’s search engine and let the students marvel over some of the stunning results. (You will need to scroll down past the picture of the day until you see a list of links. Click on the one that says “search” which will bring you to a box where you can type in “stars”. You should get over 2,000 results with that parameter.

The Competitive Edge:

You Can Count On It (20 minutes)

Play a fun relay game that involves different kinds of counting.

BEFORE CLASS:

1. Blow up a good number of balloons. You can easily transport them into your classroom in a big trash bag where they can be stored when not in use.

Supplies:

- › Balloons
- › Large boxes

DURING CLASS:

1. Divide students into two teams for a relay. In each round of play, two members of the team face each other.
 2. For each round, call out a way for the teams to count to 100 or as close as they can get to 100 while tossing a balloon back and forth. Some possible counting patterns include skip counting by 2, 4, 5, and 10, add 5/subtract 3 (or other adding/subtracting or multiplying/dividing patterns), counting by fractions, or listing all prime numbers as near as they can get to 100.
 3. Every time one of them calls out the next number, they must toss the balloon to their partner. When the pair gets to or near to 100, they run to their team's designated box and put the balloon in, then tag the next pair on their team who will do the same thing but with a different counting pattern, which they will ask you for. The first team to get a designated number of balloons into their team box wins.
- ✦ TIP: Students will have different abilities with numbers. Keep the game light and fun. If a pair is struggling with their counting pattern, they can be allowed to get help from their fellow teammates on the sidelines. If you sense patterns are getting too hard, go with easier patterns. To increase the game's silly factor, you could also give directions that involve words with an easier counting pattern. For example, have them skip count by 2s, but every time they call out their number, they have to put an animal with it (2 pandas, 4 rabbits, 6 giraffes, etc.).

Simply Serving:

Protection for Wanderers (15 minutes)

Plan a blanket drive for those in need of protection and shelter this winter.

BEFORE CLASS:

1. Research a local homeless shelter or refugee group that your students' blanket drive can serve. Your church may already have a relationship with a local ministry, and if not, this could be a good time to initiate one. You could also look into regional or national groups which serve people in need.

Supplies

- › Information on homeless shelter or refugee group

DURING CLASS:

1. **Abram was a Bedouin, a nomadic tent-dweller. While there are still people in our world today who live in tents by choice, there are many others who live in tents because they have no other shelter. People sometimes live in refugee camps or tent cities. Today we are going to plan a blanket drive to benefit a ministry that serves people in that kind of need. The God who was a shield and protection for Abram calls us to provide loving shelter for those in need.**
 2. Provide students with information about the ministry they will be serving.
 3. Help students plan the details of the drive. This should include
 - possible times when the drive can take place
 - where boxes for donations can be kept
 - announcements to the congregation about the drive
 - delivery of the blankets.
- ✚ TIP: Ideally, the blanket drive should take place early enough in the school year to get blankets to the shelter in time for really cold weather. Help students plan accordingly.

Worship Connection:

Amen to That! (10-15 minutes)

Lead a call and response time for the congregation.

Supplies

- › Activity Sheet #3-2.A
- › Paper
- › Pens or pencils

DURING CLASS:

1. **The word used for Abram's faith in God is "he'emin." It means to trust or have confidence, and it is where we get our word "amen." When we say amen, we are saying, "so be it" or that we trust God to bring about the answer to our prayer.**
2. Help students create a simple "call and response" liturgy that they can lead for the wider congregation. They can practice it in class.
3. Use the scriptural promises listed on Activity Sheet 3-2.A. Students can preface each reading of a Scriptural promise with a simple phrase such as "Hear the promise of God." Make sure to leave room for a response of "Amen" to each Scriptural promise.
4. Find a time when youth can actually lead the congregation in this liturgy.

Sending the Story (5 minutes)

DURING CLASS:

1. **Today we have seen the amazing hugeness of God's promise to Abram and Abram's deeply faithful response to God in spite of the fact that his circumstances might have led him to doubt that the promise was even possible. God's promise to Abram was a promise not just to bless him, but to bless future generations through him.**
2. Darken the room and give each student a tea light. If you have a way of projecting a picture of a starry sky on the wall or ceiling, you may want to do so. If not, simply have each student turn on their tea light.
3. **Abram looked up at the night sky and pondered God's promise. God did not just mean that Abram would have a lot of children and grandchildren, but that all people who had faith as Abram did would be his descendants. When we have faith in the God who made and kept promises to Abram, we too are part of that family represented by the starry sky.**
4. **Let's hear again the words from today's story, when God made Abram this promise. And then let's respond to that promise with our own "Amen!"**
5. Read aloud, or have a student read aloud, today's key verse: "He brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he believed the LORD, and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness." Genesis 15: 5-6
6. **And everyone responds: "Amen!"**

Supplies

› Battery-operated tea lights

Remember to send "The Story @ Home" take home sheet with students before dismissing them.

Worship Connection: Amen to That!

Lead a call and response time for the congregation.

The Scriptures are full of “great and precious promises” (2 Peter 1:4). Many of these promises were spoken to people like Abram. Many of these promises are also spoken to us, the heirs of Abram, as we listen to and receive God’s word. Here are a few of God’s promises we can gratefully receive, speaking them to others and to ourselves as we remember the goodness of our promise-keeping God.

When you are tired or discouraged...

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:28-29)

When you are in need of forgiveness....

If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

Come now, let us argue it out,
says the LORD:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be like snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool. (Isaiah 1:18)

When you are afraid...

“...do not fear, for I am with you,
do not be afraid, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10)

When you need to remember the depths of God’s love...

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

When you need peace...

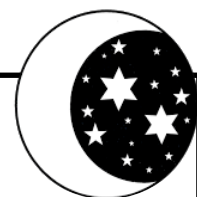
“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” (John 14:27)

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

God's Promise to Abram

The Story @ Home + Youth #3-2

Genesis 15:1-6



The Point

God's love for humanity is shown through God's specific care for us as individuals, communities, and families. In today's story, we see God's ongoing love for humanity through God's specific call of one man, Abram. God promises to bless Abram, and Abram trusts that God will keep that promise.

Story Connections

Last week we saw how the first man and woman disobeyed and wandered from God's call. This week we see a much different and more faithful response from Abram, who trusts that God will keep God's promise even though he cannot entirely understand how God will make that happen.

Story Summary

This week's story focuses in on God's relationship with Abram, whom God calls to have a very special place in God's redemptive plans for all people. Abram listens to God and chooses to trust God, even when he does not entirely understand the fullness of God's vision or how it will be brought about.

In chapter 15, we see God coming to Abram and reassuring him, in a vision, of God's ongoing protection and provision. This promise seems to make Abram bold enough to confess his doubts to God about how the promise will be carried out. He reminds God that he does not yet have any direct descendants. God then points the night sky out to Abram and makes him an astonishing promise: that his offspring will be as numerous as the stars in the heavens. It is an amazing promise, one that would no doubt be difficult to believe, but Abram does believe.

Spiritual Practice: Fellowship

God's call to Abram is a call for Abram to walk deeper in faith and trust with God, thus increasing his fellowship with God. This week take a walk and consider your own relationship with God. Invite family members to join you on this walk. You could even make it a family walk at nighttime under the stars.

Last Week/Next Week

Last week we learned about God's provision for the very first human beings and how they wandered from God. This week, we learned about God's ongoing love for humanity through God's call to Abram, who responded in faith and trust to God's promise about his descendants. Next week's story will show one of the descendants of the promise, Joseph, living through great difficulty and needing God's deliverance.

Bible Nuts and Bolts: *Origin Stories*

Genesis is all about beginnings or origins. When we read origin stories, they provide us with the background we need to answer questions we may have about why things are as they are. Sometimes these are big questions and help us to form our worldview: Why is there a world? Was there a purpose in making the world? Why do people do bad things? These origin stories in Genesis are a kind of "back story" that helps us to unlock and understand everything else we read in the Bible.

Going Deeper

As you hear and study these stories each week, consider what God has to say to you and your family. What is God's message to us? Consider the following basic pattern as a way of forming family devotions:

- ✠ Light a candle to help you focus this time as "God time." Pray a simple prayer together.
- ✠ Take a moment to check in with each other; what are each person's "highs" and "lows" today?
- ✠ Read aloud from the Daily Bible Readings from below. Discuss the questions following each.
- ✠ End with a blessing, by simply tracing a cross on each other's forehead. The Lord's Prayer is a good way to end your devotion time. If you used a candle, extinguish it as a sign of the end of the devotions.

Note: This is only a suggested pattern. It will vary with your household's context and patterns. What works best for you? First thing in the morning? Over breakfast? Bed time? Be creative and flexible with how you practice and keep your devotions!

Daily Bible Readings

Sunday - Read Genesis 15:1-6

God makes an outrageous promise to Abram.

- Have you ever been promised something that you did not believe could happen? Did it? How did that make you feel?
- Make a promise to your family members that you know you can keep.

Monday - Read Genesis 17:1-8

God repeats the promise to Abram and gives him a new name.

- Why do you think God changed Abram's name to Abraham?
- What else does God promise to Abraham (besides descendants)?

Tuesday - Read Genesis 18:1-15

Three guests visit Abraham and Sarah in their old age and promise them that Sarah will have a son.

- What do the visitors tell Abraham that seems so astonishing? What might be significant about the number of visitors?
- Why do you think Sarah laughed when she heard their news?

Wednesday - Read Genesis 21:1-7

Sarah bears a son named Isaac.

- How do you think Sarah's laughter changes from yesterday's story to this one?
- In what ways might Abraham and Sarah have changed as a result of their son's birth?

Thursday - Read Genesis 22:1-14

God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son.

- Why do you think God asks Abraham to do something so hard and unthinkable?
- What does this story tell us about Abram? About God? Do you see echoes of this story in the New Testament?

Friday - Read Genesis 27:1-17, 30-38

Jacob steals his brother Esau's blessing.

- Why does Rebecca have Jacob steal Esau's blessing? How do you think this made Jacob and Esau feel?
- Isaac had only one blessing to give. How are God's blessings different?

Saturday - Read Genesis 35:9-15

God appears to Jacob, changes his name, and gives him a blessing.

- Why do you think God changes Jacob's name? What is included in the blessing God gives Jacob?
- How would you describe Jacob's response? How do you respond when God speaks to you?