

Abraham in God's Story

Understanding Abraham in the light of
the Bible's Great Story



Facilitator's Guide



Abraham in God's Story: Understanding Abraham in the light of the Bible's Great Story (Facilitator's Guide)

© Volker Glissmann and Ruth Guinness



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Abraham in God’s Story:

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(Facilitator’s Guide)

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Introduction for Facilitators

Welcome to the *Abraham in God's Story* course. We are so glad that you want to help others to learn how Abraham fits in **God's Story** by being a facilitator.

The idea behind this course is that the book acts as a teacher. Ideally, everyone – the learners, and you as facilitator – needs to work through each lesson before you meet as a group. The group meeting will be led by you as facilitator, and you will guide the other learners through the lesson with discussion. We hope you will find that through the discussion everyone learns from everyone else.

The course contains six lessons. If your group has already studied the course *The Story of God and His World*, you can probably study the Welcome and Introduction pages together with Lesson 1 in one meeting. If your group has not studied *The Story of God and His World*, we suggest that you take one meeting to go through the Introduction and Welcome in the workbook, and ensure learners are familiar with **God's Story**.

We have written this guide to help you to know what your role involves. Even if you have led this sort of course before, please do read through this guide as there may be some things that are different.

It is best to work through the course by yourself first, so that you know where the answers come from, before checking with the model answers. Note:

- Many of the answers are taken from the Bible. We have used the NIV. Sometimes you may want to ask learners to read a passage. Each lesson focuses on a key passage, an event in Abraham's life, but other Bible passages are also referred to.
- Some answers ask for what the learners think. Therefore, we have only given possible answers. The learners may come up with others.
- In general, keep the answers short and to the point so as to stay on the main ideas.
- In the model answers we have sometimes provided several answers to a question though learners may just have one or two. It is fine to only have one or two answers. We have sometimes added notes which you may want to use to prompt fuller understanding.

We wrote this course with a purpose. It is for anyone who wants to understand what they are reading in the Bible by seeing how the passage fits into **God's Story**. That may include new Christians, or it may include people who have been Christians for many years but who have not had the opportunity to understand the Bible as one story. It may be particularly helpful for lay leaders in the church who can then use what they learn in talking with and teaching others.

We have designed the questions to help people to learn and grow - not only in head knowledge, but also to grow in their walk with God and in their service of God.

By the end of the course, learners should be able to:

- Use guiding questions to help them to understand a Bible passage and see where it belongs in God's Story.
- Recognise some of the key ideas and words that occur again and again in God's Story.
- Deepen their relationship with God through their reflections and actions coming out of the study.

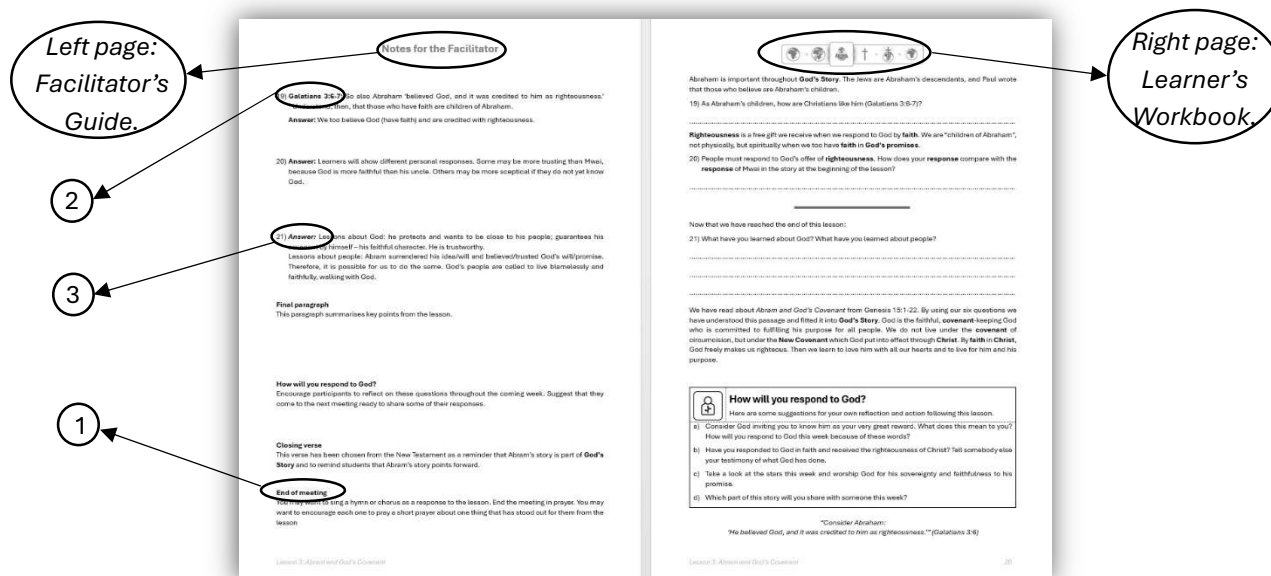
We would love to hear how you and your group get on! We would also love to hear any suggestions or comments you have about the course. Please contact us through the TEEnet email: info@teenet.org

Thank you for being a facilitator, enabling others to learn from this course, from each other, and from *Abraham in God's Story*.

Volker Glissmann and Ruth Guinness

How to use the Facilitator's Guide

This guide has been designed so that as a facilitator you only need to work with one book. This guide contains the entire workbook that every participant has. Following these introductory pages, you will find that the pages from the workbook are on the right-hand side, with notes to guide you as a facilitator on the left-hand side.



The left-hand pages contain:

1. Subheadings to guide you through the lesson, including what you need to do before a meeting, at the beginning of a meeting, and at the end of a meeting.
2. Biblical text of verses that are required reading in order to answer questions. This allows for easy reference in a meeting.
3. Model answers for each question:
 - Some questions ask for what people notice. Remember that different people will notice different things. You may find yourself learning from what a learner shares.
 - Many questions include a Bible reference. Remember that the key passage for the lesson has been copied into the workbook. Encourage learners to find the answers in the Bible text.
 - Other questions ask for learners to think about the significance of something. These questions are designed to encourage the learners to think for themselves so that they will understand God's Story better.
 - We have not given model answers for the personal reflection questions which encourage learners to respond to God. Nevertheless, all participants will be encouraged as people share their reflections.

We have designed the course for learners to follow easily. As a facilitator, it is helpful that you are aware of some of the design characteristics. Under most headings there is an opening sentence. There are usually sentences between questions. These usually contain the answers, although the answers may appear in a different form. This enables learners to check whether they have understood the material. The repetition of words and ideas is deliberate, to help the learning process.

Notes for the Facilitator

Suggested lesson plan for first meeting

Course Welcome and prayer

What to expect from the course

Course Courtesy

Welcome and Introduction (page 1-4) (this will be enough if your group has not studied *The Story of God and His World*)

Lesson 1 – Abram and God’s promise (page 5-9) (if your group has already studied *The Story of God and His World*)

Course welcome

Please welcome the learners to the course and encourage them to draw close to God through their study.

What to expect from the course

Please highlight the following course elements.

- *Abraham in God’s Story* is a 6-week foundational course to help learners understand Bible passages within the whole of **God’s Story**. It is suggested that some groups that did not study *The Story of God and His World* meet for 7 weeks. Please tell your group how long you will meet for. Our group meeting lasts around 1 ½ hours.
- The learners should study BEFORE the lesson, using a Bible to look up verses, and write down their answers to each question by themselves. The questions are there to point to important verses and ideas.
- Some questions are easy, but are there to slow learners down to focus on interesting and important elements of verses. This ensures that they are thinking about the ideas themselves.
- The facilitator is the tour guide. Our discussion is important as everyone brings to the table what they have learned from the lesson in the book.
- The course follows a path, or a journey. There may be interesting diversions, but the facilitator may need to bring the group back to the main path.
- Encourage learners to reflect and continue learning after the meeting by using the reflection questions at the end of the lesson.
- There is no exam. A Certificate of Completion will be offered for attending at least 4 lessons.

Course courtesy

Please agree on the course courtesy.

- Starting and finishing times.
- What will everyone call each other?
- Everyone has the right to speak and to be listened to.
- Everyone should give each other room to participate.
- There are no stupid questions (do not laugh at another learner’s question).
- Be kind, considerate and respectful.

Page 1 - Welcome (on the right)

Please briefly highlight the text box “God’s Story,” the purpose of the course (see text box) and the six questions.

Welcome

Welcome to *Abraham in God's Story*! We are glad that you have chosen to study this course.

What can you expect from this course? You will read Bible passages about Abraham and learn how Abraham's story can be understood by thinking about **God's Story**. You will practice using guiding questions to discover how a passage fits in **God's Story**. You may find it helpful to study our other course, *The Story of God and His World*, first. That course introduces the main sections in **God's Story**. If you have not done that, do not worry. This course should still make sense.

God's Story

We use "God's Story" as a way of describing the Bible story. It is the big story, the overall story from Genesis to Revelation.

The purpose of this course is so that you will be able to:

- Use guiding questions to help you to understand a Bible passage and see where it belongs in **God's Story**
- Recognise some of the key ideas and words that occur again and again in **God's Story**
- Deepen your relationship with God through your reflections and actions coming out of the study.

Many books and Bible studies have been written about Abraham. This one is different because it deliberately looks at the story of Abraham in the light of **God's Story**. The emphasis is not that we should have **faith** like Abraham (although that is good) but is on what God is doing in **God's Story**. Abraham and others in the Bible had choices about how to live in **response** to God. They could live in a close **relationship** with God, or not. We have the same choice today.

Guiding questions

In this book each lesson covers one story about Abraham. The following questions will guide your study and can also be used any time you read the Bible.



- What do you notice in this passage?

This question helps you to observe the text. Note down anything that stands out to you, or is particularly interesting in some way.



- Where does this passage belong in God's Story?

This gives the context by looking at what has happened in this section of God's Story so far, and in the previous sections (using the 6-section outline).



- What do you notice about God?

God is always working to fulfil his purpose in God's Story, revealing his character. His work can be seen even when he is not mentioned.



- What do you notice about people?

People's thoughts, words and actions reflect their understanding of and relationship with God, and impact all relationships.



- How does this passage connect with the rest of the Bible?

Here we will see themes – ideas and words – in the passage that continue through God's Story.



- How will you respond to God?

Here you are challenged to apply lessons to your own life. As we pray, reflect, and do something in response to God's word, the Holy Spirit works to transform us.

Notes for the Facilitator

Note: two of the guiding questions are new to this course. Four of them are the same as those found in *The Story of God and His World* course.

Note: point out the design of the workbook, with key words in bold (and also listed in the glossary), italics and images for sections of God's Story, and repetition.

Note: please highlight the learning cycle diagram. Learners will be used to learning at school where the teacher gives them the information and they might have some homework to do afterwards. This course is different. The learners do the work before the meeting, and come together to discuss what they have found out.

The foundational course, *The Story of God and His World*, introduced four guiding questions. This course adds two more. These two extra questions are there to help us to see how the Bible passage we are reading fits in **God's Story** as a whole. The extra questions are:

- Where does this passage fit in **God's Story**?
- How does this passage connect with the rest of the Bible?

The first of these questions is asked near the beginning, and helps us to see the big picture of **God's Story** and what has happened already. The second question is asked near the end, and looks at how key themes from the Bible passage we have been studying connect to the rest of **God's Story** as we continue through the Bible.

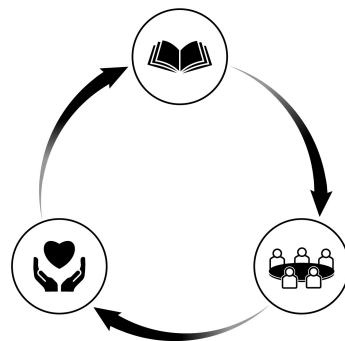
In the course you will see that we use repetition a lot. This is on purpose to emphasise important things. The more we read and think about something, the more easily we will remember it. We ask many questions to help you to slow down and think carefully. This also highlights key ideas that you might otherwise miss. Many of the key repeated words are listed in the glossary at the end of the workbook. They are also highlighted in **bold** in the text to help you notice them.

You will see that we often refer to the six sections of **God's Story**. We indicate these by writing the title of each of these sections in *italic*. You will also see the symbols that we use for each section. For example, *Creation* .

You will learn most if you study each lesson on your own, writing down your answers, then meet with a group to discuss what you are learning, and then continue to reflect and act on what you have learned. This cycle is shown in the diagram on the right.

We pray that you will find this course helpful in understanding Abraham's story, and in seeing how you fit into **God's Story**. We would love you to use what you learn from this course when you read other Bible passages.

Volker Glissmann and Ruth Guinness



Notes for the Facilitator

Key points in the introduction

As the facilitator, it is helpful for you to be aware of these key points:

- The six sections of **God's Story**. You may want to see if the learners can remember these from before. If this story is new, encourage the learners to learn the six sections of the story.
- Understanding **God's Story** is vital for understanding Bible passages such as those about Abraham.
- A summary of Abraham's story. This course does not cover his whole life.
- An emphasis on Abraham as God's friend. Relationships are a key part of **God's Story**.

Introduction

This course builds on *The Story of God and His World*, a course which shows **God's Story** in six sections:

	Creation God created the heavens and the earth and made people in his image to be like kings under him, that all would live in peace under his blessing and worship him.
	Rebellion People rebelled against God, making themselves kings in his place, and broke all the relationships of blessing God had made.
	God's Promise God promised restored relationships through Israel, but they were unfaithful.
	Christ God sent his Son Jesus as the faithful and true Israel to restore all relationships in heaven and on earth.
	God's Mission God sent his Church on his mission in his power to share the good news of restoration to the whole world and to worship him.
	New Creation God's Son Jesus will return as King to judge and set all things right, by finally punishing all evil. God will live on the restored earth with all his redeemed people, with all living in peace under his blessing and worshipping him.

The story of Abraham is very important as it starts the *God's Promise*  section of **God's Story**. The promise given to Abraham runs through the rest of **God's Story** until it is fulfilled in the *New Creation* .

A summary of the story of Abraham

The story of Abraham is found in Genesis 11:27 - 25:11. Abram had moved with his father from the city of Ur to Harran. The Bible follows Abram's life from the time he was aged 75. He obeyed God's **call** to move, with his wife Sarai and nephew Lot, to a land that God would show him. God promised to **bless** him and his family, and through them, to **bless** all peoples on earth. Abram arrived in the Promised Land, and **worshipped** God there. After this, he went to **Egypt** because of famine. He later returned to the Promised Land. God made a **covenant** with Abraham and Abraham believed **God's promises**. After a long wait, God gave Abraham a son, Isaac. This fulfilled part of the promise. Abraham died still trusting that God would fulfil his whole promise.

At the beginning of the story, Abraham is called Abram. God changed his name in Genesis 17. In the lessons we will use either Abram or Abraham, according to the Bible passage.

Notes for the Facilitator

Note: highlight the words in the text boxes, and make sure learners see the importance of these two ideas – relationship and response. They will be repeated throughout the course.

- 1) **Answer:** “Abraham my friend”. This is amazing! (*individuals will have different reactions*).

Note for this question and the one below, encourage participants to engage with the text and think about what it means to be called and treated as a friend by God himself! There is no need to go into too much detail as this is the Introduction. However, these questions help to lay the foundation. The idea of relationship will be picked up throughout the course.

- 2) **Answer:** “You are my friends”. This too is amazing! (*individuals will have different reactions*).

Note: look at the diagram of **God’s Story** here. It highlights *God’s Promise*, the section that Abraham’s Story is found in. Note the arrows within the diagram that point back to the first two sections of the story and on to the next three sections. Placing Abraham within **God’s Story** is the key idea in this course.

Abraham the friend of God

In **God's Story**, we see God's desire to have a good **relationship** with all that he has made. After people rebelled against him, God started his plan to restore **relationships**. The God of all **creation** invites people to have a **relationship** with him. He longs for people to respond to his invitation.

Relationship

In God's Story we read a lot about relationships. Relationships can be good or bad. God wants our relationship with him to grow deeper.

Response

God longs for people to respond to his love. We can respond negatively or positively.

Abraham responded to God in **faith**. He recognised who God was. He gave up his life in Haran to follow God. He believed **God's promises**. He did not always get everything right. In Abraham's story we see ups and downs. Yet the story of Abraham being prepared to **sacrifice** Isaac shows just how deep his understanding of and **relationship** with God had grown.

- 1) What did God call Abraham in Isaiah 41:8? What is your reaction to this description?

.....

In a friendship we expect good signs of **relationship**. These include two-way communication, love, joy in each other's company, appreciation of who the other is, and loyalty. Sometimes friendships go through difficult times when people do not communicate well and grow distant.

In each lesson on Abraham, we will think about his **relationship** with God. We will see whether he is responding well to God or not. This will help us to think about the way we relate to God.

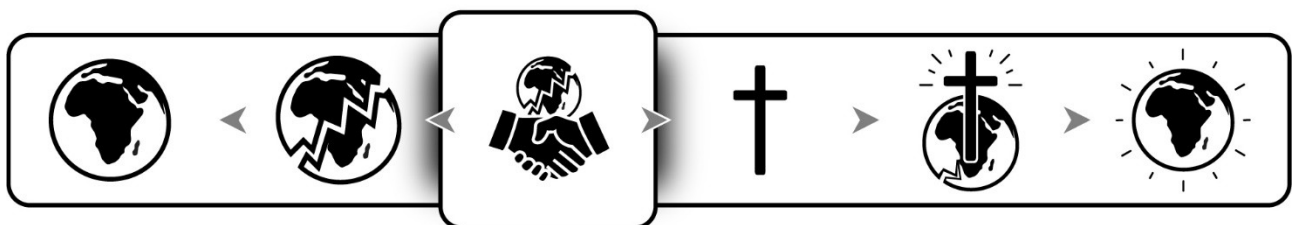
- 2) What did Jesus call his disciples in John 15:15? What does this mean to you?

.....

Like Abraham, God wants a close **relationship** with us, and Jesus calls his disciples friends! May your friendship with Jesus be enriched as you go through these lessons.

Please note that this course does not cover all the Bible chapters about Abraham. We have just selected six passages.

You will see the following diagram above each lesson. It is a reminder that Abraham's story fits in the *God's Promise*  section of **God's Story**. It both looks back to what has gone before, and forward to what is to come.



Notes for the Facilitator

Before the meeting

As the facilitator, please work through the lesson yourself before the meeting.

Opening story

This story was written in Malawi. Many migrant workers leave Malawi to work in South Africa.

Answer: It is likely Takondwa was prepared to leave because she trusted her husband (*this is the aspect we want to emphasise; participants may also have written about poverty or about the promise of riches*). Allow individual answers for what learners would have felt in her place.

What do you notice in this passage?

Note: this is deliberately a broad question, encouraging learners to read and reflect on the Bible text.

Answer: each learner may notice something different. For example: God initiated a conversation with Abram, choosing to speak with him, and cementing their relationship with an amazing promise. Abram showed trust in God by going. His relationship with God was one of reverence and worship.



Lesson 1: Abram and God's Promise



Takondwa looked at everything around her: the small house she called home, the flowerpots outside, and the mountains in the distance. Soon she would leave it all behind. Her husband had moved to South Africa and was calling her to go and live with him there. He promised that he would provide for her, and that she would have a good house with electricity and a small garden to grow vegetables. Tomorrow she would leave on the bus.

Why was Takondwa prepared to leave? If you were in her place, would you have left?

.....

Genesis 12:1-8

¹ The LORD had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.'

² 'I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.'

³ 'I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'

⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. ⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

⁶ Abram travelled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ The LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land.' So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

⁸ From there he went on towards the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.



What do you notice in this passage?

Think especially about actions and attitudes highlighting **relationships**.

.....

.....

Notes for the Facilitator

- 1) **Answer:** Creation and Rebellion. Please make sure that learners grasp the 6 parts of **God's Story**, and the titles given to each part.

- 2) **Genesis 1:31:** ³¹God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

Answer: Very good.

Text boxes

It will be helpful to remind learners of these definitions. The definition of blessing here is different from popular definitions of blessing.

- 3) **Answer:** Because they had rebelled against God. They wanted to rule themselves, not to rule under God.

- 4) **Genesis 11:9:** ⁹That is why it was called Babel^[a] – because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

^a That is, Babylon; *Babel* sounds like the Hebrew for *confused*.

Answer: They were scattered all over the earth with different languages.

- 5) **Answer:** We know that everything started off good, but there is now a problem (rebellion) which needs to be solved. Recognising that there is a problem raises the question, “So, what can be done?”. Abram's story is at the beginning of the third section, *God's Promise*. We see that God is graciously beginning to give a solution to the problem.



How does this passage connect to God's Story so far?

This passage is near the beginning of the Bible. It begins the third main section of **God's Story**, *God's Promise* (see *Introduction*).

- 1) Which two main sections of **God's Story** come before Genesis 12:1-8?

God's Story began with the goodness of *Creation* which was then broken by people's *Rebellion* . Let's think about why it is important to know this. When we read about Abram, we need to remember that *Creation* and *Rebellion* have already happened and think about what effect this has on Abram's story.

- 2) How did God describe everything he had made (Genesis 1:31)?

God's Story shows that the world was very good in the beginning! God made people in his **image** to be like kings under him. God had a good purpose which included **blessing** all his **creation**.

God's purpose

From the beginning, God had a purpose for everyone to live in peace with God, self, others and all creation, and to worship him. This purpose runs through God's Story and is seen as God works to restore relationships.

Blessing

True blessing is linked to God's purpose. True blessing is a good relationship with God, serving and worshipping him, and enjoying peace with God, self, others and all creation.

- 3) Why were all peoples on earth not living under God's **blessing** in the time of Abram?

In *Rebellion* , people rebelled against God, taking themselves away from his **blessing**. Since Adam and Eve all people have lived in **rebellion** against God, choosing to rule themselves and not live under God's rule.

- 4) At the end of the story of the Tower of Babel, what happened to all people (Genesis 11:9)?

The result of **rebellion** was God's judgement. People were scattered over the world in different language groups. **Relationships** were broken.

- 5) What is the significance of the first two sections of **God's Story** for understanding Abram's story?

As we come to Genesis 12:1-8 we know that there was a problem. Yet **God's purpose** was good. The story cannot end in Genesis 11! There was a big question: "How will **God's purpose** be fulfilled now that **relationships** are broken and people are scattered over the world?" God revealed his solution to this problem in the third section of **God's Story**, *God's Promise* , beginning with Abram.

Notes for the Facilitator

6) **Answer:** b) Abram was not told.

7) **Answer:** The land of the Canaanites (see verse 6).

8) **Answer:** Note that there are two words to describe here, "great" and "nation." "Great" may be understood in terms of numbers (many people), but also in terms of quality (influential, significant). "Nation" is a large group of people, more than one family.

9) **Genesis 12:3:** I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

Answer: They all peoples would be blessed through Abram (and his family/descendants).

10) **Hebrews 11:8:** By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

Answer: Abram was trusting and obedient.

11) **Answer:** God is trustworthy. He is also Sovereign and has authority.



Genesis 12 starts with God speaking to one man, Abram.

- 7) Which land was Abram in when God said: “To your offspring I will give this land” (Genesis 12:7)?

8) God **promised** “a great nation” (Genesis 12:2). What do you think God meant by these words?

9) What was **God's promise** for all peoples on earth (Genesis 12:3)?

1. The **promise** of a land
2. The **promise** of a nation
3. The **promise** of **blessing** – to Abram’s family and to all peoples on earth.



In Genesis 12, the main person who is responding to God is Abram.

- 10) "So Abram went" (Genesis 12:4). What does this tell you about Abram? Hebrews 11:8 may help you.

11) What was it about God that made Abram respond by obeying him?

Notes for the Facilitator

- 12) **Genesis 12:7-8:** ⁷ The LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your offspring[a] I will give this land.' So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸ From there he went on towards the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.

Answer: Abram built an altar and called on God. He worshipped God.

- 13) **Answer:** He was grateful that God had brought him to the land. Another good answer is that he wanted to remember his time of entry into the land.

- 14) **Matthew 4:19:** 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will send you out to fish for people.'

Answer: An invitation to follow him with the purpose to reach others ("fish" for people).

- 15) **Answer:** He is always trustworthy, faithful.

- 16) **Galatians 3:8:** Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.'

Genesis 12:3: I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

Answer: It is good news because the blessing of restored relationships is open to everyone – people from every nation, not just Abram's physical descendants.



Abram's **response** to God is a good example for us to follow. Remember the story of Takondwa at the beginning of the lesson. She believed that her husband was trustworthy and so was prepared to trust him. God is much more trustworthy than a person, and we can trust him.

12) What action of Abram is repeated in both Genesis 12:7 and 8?

.....

13) Why do you think he did this?

.....

Abram's **worship** is a good way to respond to God. Abram had seen God work in his life and was thankful.

In Genesis 12:1-8, we see that Abram's **relationship** with God was developing. God took the initiative by inviting Abram to trust him. Abram obeyed, went to an unknown land, and **worshipped** God. By doing this Abram was moving away from the traditions of his ancestors who had **worshipped** other gods (see Joshua 24:2). He was learning that God is a God who wants to have a personal **relationship** with people.



How does this passage connect to the rest of God's Story?

In **God's Story**, the section after *God's Promise*  is *Christ* . Through **Christ**, who was a descendant of Abram, all peoples can be brought back into right **relationships** with God, self, others, and **creation**, receiving true **blessing**. This happens through *God's Mission*  and is then fulfilled in the *New Creation* .

God chose to work through Abram. As we read the rest of the Bible, we see that this is the way God works. He invites people to work with him.

14) What is Jesus' invitation, and his purpose, in Matthew 4:19?

.....

.....

God, in **Christ**, has chosen us, too, inviting us to be his disciples and to take part in *God's Mission* . Like Abram we have the opportunity to learn to live by **faith**. Just as Abram was not told where he was going, God does not promise to tell us all the details about our future. 2 Corinthians 5:7 tells us that "We live by faith not by sight."

15) When we decide to trust God even without knowing all the details, what will we learn about God?

.....

God is always trustworthy, through good and bad times, even when we cannot understand his ways.

16) In Galatians 3:8 Paul refers to the **promise** of Genesis 12:3, "all peoples on earth will be **blessed** through you" as "the gospel." How is the **promise** of Genesis 12:3 good news?

.....

Christians around the world are part of the fulfilment of this **promise**! It is good news that all people, no matter where they are from or who they are, can be restored to a **relationship** with God through **Christ**.

God's Story finishes with everything being set right in the final section, *New Creation* .

Notes for the Facilitator

17) **Revelation 5:9:** And they sang a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.'

Answer: People from every nation will be in God's presence, worshipping him, because of the Lamb. (You may wish you to note, that the Lamb – the Lord Jesus Christ – was a descendant of Abram, so the blessing has come "through" Abram.

18) **Answer:** Lessons about God: he is trustworthy. He works for his good purpose. He wants restored relationships with all. He makes promises.

Lessons about people: Abram trusted and obeyed God. A good model for us – we should trust and obey too.

Final paragraph

This paragraph summarises key points from the lesson.

How will you respond to God?

Encourage participants to reflect on these questions throughout the coming week. Suggest that they come to the next meeting ready to share some of their responses.

Closing verse

This verse has been chosen from the New Testament as a reminder that Abram's story is part of **God's Story** and to remind students that Abram's story points forward.

End of meeting

You may want to sing a hymn or chorus as a response to the lesson. End the meeting in prayer. You may want to encourage each one to pray a short prayer about one thing that has stood out for them from the lesson



17) What does it look like when the **promise** of Genesis 12:3 is fulfilled (Revelation 5:9)?

.....

The **promise** in Genesis 12 points back to the good **relationships** in *Creation* , and forward through the development of *God's Promise*  in the Old Testament to *Christ* . Through **Christ's** death and resurrection, **all nations** can be **blessed**. The **promise** points even further forward to the *New Creation*  when the redeemed from every nation will **worship** around God's throne!

When you read the Bible, see if you can find references or hints to this **promise** of God in Genesis 12:3.

Now that we have reached the end of this lesson:

18) What have you learned about God? What have you learned about people?

.....

.....

.....

We have read about *Abram and God's Promise* from Genesis 12:1-8. By using our six questions we have understood this passage and fitted it into **God's Story**. God chose Abram, taking him out of Ur and promising him the land of Canaan. He also **promised** a nation coming from Abram, and **promised** that all peoples would be **blessed** through him. He was inviting Abram to take part in **God's purpose**. God was looking beyond Abram's life to **God's purpose** to bring all peoples back into a **relationship** of **blessing** with him. Abram responded to God by believing **God's promise** and obeying.



How will you respond to God?

Here are some suggestions for your own reflection and action following this lesson.

- Is there an area in your life where God is inviting you to follow him, though you cannot see clearly? What do you need to do about this?
- Reflect on how you are part of the fulfilment of God's promise.
- Abram responded to God by worshipping him in a special way. How will you worship God this week?
- Who can you share Abram's story with this week?

"Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.'" (Galatians 3:8)

Notes for the Facilitator

Before the meeting

As the facilitator, please work through the lesson yourself before the meeting.

Please be aware that this lesson contains discussion of exploitation of women. If there are women in your group, please treat the subject with pastoral care and make sure their voices are heard.

Beginning of the meeting

Welcome learners and start with prayer. You may want to begin the time by singing a hymn or chorus.

Before starting Lesson 2, ask the learners how they got on with the reflection questions. “How will you respond to God?” from Lesson 1. Some can share what they did. This helps to build accountability and is an encouragement to all.

Opening story

Answer: There may be differing opinions here – that Pastor Banda should go back to the village, or that they should stay in the city. Either way, look for the reasons given, especially the idea of seeking God and not giving up. A reason to return is that this was the place God wanted them to be.

There is no need to debate this story for long. It is there to set the scene and open minds to thinking about God’s calling and our location, and the challenging circumstances those following God face.



Lesson 2: Abram in Egypt



Pastor Banda and his wife had been called by God and sent by their church to serve in a remote village. Everyone had agreed that this was the place God had planned for them. At first it was good, but then the rains and the crops failed. They began to wonder whether God really wanted them there or not. To look after their family, they decided to move back to the city. For Pastor Banda, it was a relief to feel that he could provide for his family again. But then things began to go wrong. There was a family conflict, his wife could not find a job, and he did not feel at peace.

What do you think the Banda family should do, and why?

.....

Genesis 12:10 - 13:4

¹⁰ Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. ¹¹ As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, 'I know what a beautiful woman you are. ¹² When the Egyptians see you, they will say, "This is his wife." Then they will kill me but will let you live. ¹³ Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you.'

¹⁴ When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that Sarai was a very beautiful woman. ¹⁵ And when Pharaoh's officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh, and she was taken into his palace. ¹⁶ He treated Abram well for her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels.

¹⁷ But the LORD inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai. ¹⁸ So Pharaoh summoned Abram. 'What have you done to me?' he said. 'Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? ¹⁹ Why did you say, "She is my sister," so that I took her to be my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!' ²⁰ Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and everything he had.

^{13:1} So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. ² Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold.

³ From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier ⁴ and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the LORD.

Notes for the Facilitator

What do you notice in this passage?

Answer: A personal relationship between God and Abram is not described here until the final verse when Abram worships. This question may therefore raise questions: Was Abram listening to God? Was the relationship more distant than before? God was still active working for Sarai (and therefore Abram).

- 1) **Genesis 12:1-3:** The LORD had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. 2 'I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'

Answer: Land, nation, blessing to all nations.

- 2) **Answer:** In the promised land.

- 3) **Genesis 12:10 – 13:4** is the passage on page 10.

Answer: At first sight, very little seems to reflect life as God intended it to be. However, God does provide for Abram, and at the end of the passage Abram is shown worshipping God.

- 4) **Genesis 12:10 – 13:4** is the passage on page 10.

Answer: Famine, broken relationships between people (Abram/Sarai/Pharaoh), diseases, broken relationship with God (as he sent the diseases).

- 5) **Answer:** God loves, and is compassionate for, the vulnerable. God's promise to Abram included Sarai. God has a good purpose for marriage between one husband and one wife.



What do you notice in this passage?

Think especially about actions and attitudes highlighting **relationships**.

.....

.....



How does this passage connect to God's Story so far?

This passage continues the beginning of the *God's Promise*  section of **God's Story**. We need to know that God has already made an amazing **promise** to Abram.

- 1) What were the three main parts of **God's promise** to Abram (Genesis 12:1-3)?
-

Following the **promise**, God had taken Abram to the Promised Land, and Abram expected to have offspring. God planned to use Abram's family to **bless** the whole world.

- 2) After this **promise**, where would you expect Abram to live?
-

Instead of staying in Canaan, Abram went to **Egypt**. This is the first mention of **Egypt** in the Bible.

We need to go back further than the previous story about Abram, to the first two sections of **God's Story**, to further understand the story of Abram in **Egypt**.

- 3) What, in Genesis 12:10 - 13:4, reflects life as God intended it to be at *Creation*  ?
-

Egypt

Ruled by the Pharaohs, Egypt was sometimes a place of refuge in the Bible. But the Egyptians worshipped other gods and often opposed God's people. Later God warned his people not to go there.

There is a lot of brokenness in this story, yet at the end Abram **worships** God. This is good and right.

- 4) What, in Genesis 12:10 - 13:4, reflects *Rebellion*  ?
-

This passage gives several examples of broken **relationships**, including with people and with the land.

There is a need for restoration of **relationships** in line with **God's promise** to Abram. As you continue to study this passage, look out for how God is working towards his purposes.



What do you notice about God?

The first time God is mentioned is in Genesis 12:17 when God caused Pharaoh and his family to suffer from diseases "because of Abram's wife Sarai."

- 5) Why was God concerned about Sarai?
-

Notes for the Facilitator

6) **Answer:** No, because it wasn't the Promised Land. He wanted them in the Promised Land.

7) **Answer:** God is merciful. He is slow to anger. He has a relationship with Abram in which he has made a promise.

Note: There is a tension here. Even Pharaoh saw that Abram was not behaving as a person of integrity. God does not condone sin. He did treat Abram with grace and mercy.

8) **Genesis 12:10 – 13:4** is the passage on page 10.

Answer: God is faithful to his promise. He is compassionate and works to rescue.

9) **Genesis 12:10 – 13:4** is the passage on page 10.

Answer: God was being true to his promise by sending disease to make Pharaoh let them go, so they could together return to the promised land..

10) **Genesis 12:10:** Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe.

Answer: They moved because of famine.

11) **Genesis 12:11-13:** As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, 'I know what a beautiful woman you are. ¹²When the Egyptians see you, they will say, "This is his wife." Then they will kill me but will let you live. ¹³Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you.'

Answer: He was afraid that Pharaoh would have killed him to get Sarai if Sarai was known as Abram's wife. He was thinking of his personal safety. He was a coward!

12) **Genesis 12:10 – 13:4** is the passage on page 10.

Answer: Possibly not! There is no evidence of prayer. If Abram had trusted God he would not have lied about Sarai. He did not show trust in God in all areas of his life.



Sarai was in a vulnerable position. She did not have a choice about where she would go. She could have been taken advantage of by Pharaoh. When the Bible says that God worked “because of” Sarai, the meaning is that God acted for her by intervening in her situation. God was also protecting the marriage of Abram and Sarai and therefore the outcome of his **promise** to Abram.

6) Abram and Sarai were now in **Egypt**. Do you think God wanted them to stay there? Why?

.....

God had **promised** Abram the land of Canaan and worked to move him back there. God can work through unbelieving kings like Pharaoh and use them to fulfil **God’s purpose**! It is interesting that although Pharaoh was angry with Abram, God is not described as being angry.

7) Why do you think that God did not show anger to Abram?

.....

God is slow to anger, and he is full of grace and mercy to Abram. God kept his covenant relationship.

8) What do you notice about God’s character in Genesis 12:10 - 13:4?

.....

God does not change. He is merciful. He is also faithful, and he protects and cares for the vulnerable.

9) How was God being true to his **promise** in Genesis 12:10 - 13:4?

.....

God had **promised** the land of Canaan. His purpose in Abram’s life would be fulfilled there, not in **Egypt**. In this passage we see God working to reunite Abram and Sarai and enable them to return to Canaan. God acted with **grace** and remembered his promise.



What do you notice about people?

In Genesis 12:10 - 13:4 we see Abram’s actions. When he made a decision, he had a choice. Some of his actions were in **response** to God, others do not seem to be.

10) From Genesis 12:10, why did Abram and Sarai move to **Egypt**?

.....

11) From Genesis 12:11-13, why did Abram tell Sarai to say that she was his sister?

.....

Abram responded to the circumstances around him. He needed food for his family and their livestock in the famine. He knew the culture of the time and that rulers such as Pharaoh could take other women to be their wives. He believed that there was a risk that he would be killed so that Pharaoh could take Sarai as his wife.

Polygamy

Pharaohs often had several wives and concubines. This included foreign wives to strengthen political alliances.

12) Do you think that Abram was trusting God in Genesis 12:10 - 13:4? Give a reason for your answer.

.....

Notes for the Facilitator

13) **Answer:** Sarai was taken by Pharaoh. She could have been mis-used. Felt betrayed, scared, dishonoured, vulnerable, abused. She was voiceless.

14) **Genesis 12:5, 8:** ⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. ... ⁸ From there he went on towards the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.

Genesis 13:1, 3, 4: ¹ So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. ... ³ From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier ⁴ and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the LORD.

Answer: Both describe Abram taking Sarai, Lot, and everything he had to the Promised Land and worshipping God near Bethel.

15) **Answer:** God remembers and rescues his people from Egypt and is faithful to his promise to take them to the Promised Land.

16) **Genesis 12:3:** I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'

Answer: To bless all nations.

17) **Answer:** His purpose is to make us fishers of people. This is for God's mission to restore relationships, so that other people will be blessed by knowing God.

Note: Question 14 in Lesson 1 asked, "What is Jesus' invitation, and his purpose, in Matthew 4:19?" The answer was: an invitation to follow him with the purpose to reach others ("fish" for people).



Evidence of trust in God might include talking with and listening to God, but such evidence is lacking.

13) What happened to Sarai because of Abram's actions? How might she have felt?

.....

.....

It may be helpful to imagine being in Sarai's place. She could have felt vulnerable and scared. Abram was neither honouring his wife nor honouring God when he protected himself but allowed Pharaoh to take Sarai into his palace.

Pharaoh showed that he valued integrity. He was angry with Abram and exposed him for not telling the full truth about Sarai. He then banished Abram from the land of **Egypt**.

14) Compare Genesis 12:5, 8 and Genesis 13:1, 3, 4. What are the similarities?

.....

.....

Abram is back on track. He took his wife, nephew, and all their possessions to a place between Bethel and Ai. He is again trusting **God's promise** in the Promised Land and responding to God in **worship**.



How does this passage connect to the rest of God's Story?

Going forward from this passage, there is a similar story about Abram in Genesis 20:1-18. Once again Abram did not tell the full truth about Sarai. Again, God protected Abram and Sarai in a foreign land. The Bible is not saying that we can be deceitful. As we remember **God's Story**, we see that God is being faithful to his **promise**. He continues to work even when we make mistakes or when circumstances seem to be against us. This is something that we can see throughout the Bible.

In Genesis 12:10 - 13:4, Abram and Sarai went to **Egypt** because of famine, and left **Egypt** when Pharaoh threw them out after God sent diseases. Does that remind you of another Bible story? In Genesis 46 Abraham's descendant Jacob and his family moved to **Egypt** because of famine. Over 400 years later, they left **Egypt** when Pharaoh threw them out after God sent ten plagues (Exodus 1 - 15).

15) How would you summarise how God works from these stories about God's people in **Egypt**?

.....

.....

God always works to fulfil his purpose. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

16) What was God's global purpose in **calling** Abram (Genesis 12:3)?

.....

God's intention to **bless** people from **all nations** is followed throughout **God's Story** – in *Christ* , *God's Mission* , and the *New Creation* .

17) Jesus **calls** his disciples. What is his purpose? Remember your answer to question 14 in lesson 1.

.....

Notes for the Facilitator

Note

“God works in every circumstance to fulfil God’s purpose.” This is an idea that is worth thinking about with the learners. It does not mean that every circumstance is good. But God is working and his purpose will finally prevail.

18) **Romans 8:28:** And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Answer: Pastor Banda has faced problems, but God will not abandon him. God will work for Pastor Banda’s good even through difficult circumstances. When Pastor Banda is following God and his purpose to reach others, God is at work, even though Pastor Banda does not yet see this and has suffered.

19) **Answer:** Lessons about God: he is faithful to his promise, he is compassionate, he doesn’t reject his people.

Lessons about people: Abram didn’t seem to be walking closely with God (a warning), and was not trusting God when he lied (another warning), and yet he worships God in the end (an encouragement that worship is the right thing). Pharaoh was a person of integrity though he didn’t know God.

Final paragraph

This paragraph summarises key points from the lesson.

How will you respond to God?

Encourage participants to reflect on these questions throughout the coming week. Suggest that they come to the next meeting ready to share some of their responses.

Closing verse

This verse has been chosen from the New Testament as a reminder that Abram’s story is part of **God’s Story** and to remind students that Abram’s story points forward.

End of meeting

You may want to sing a hymn or chorus as a response to the lesson. End the meeting in prayer. You may want to encourage each one to pray a short prayer about one thing that has stood out for them from the lesson.



We are **called** according to **God's purpose**, the same purpose with which God **called** Abram. God still works so that all people will hear the good news about Jesus. He wants people to respond to him and be **blessed** with restored **relationships** with God, self, others and **creation**.

God works in every circumstance to fulfil **God's purpose**. Those circumstances may not be good, either because of what is happening around us or because of our own choices. Throughout **God's Story** we see his people in difficult situations. Sometimes it is because they have made mistakes. However, God is always faithful. We need to learn to trust God when things go wrong and when we cannot see how God will fulfil his purpose.

18) How would you explain Romans 8:28 to Pastor Banda in the story at the beginning of this lesson?

.....

.....



Now that we have reached the end of this lesson:

19) What have you learned about God? What have you learned about people?

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.....

We have read about *Abram in Egypt* from Genesis 12:10 - 13:4. By using our six questions we have understood this passage and fitted it into **God's Story**. God always works towards his **promise**. His people have the choice to respond to him in trust, even when we cannot see how things can work out.



How will you respond to God?

Here are some suggestions for your own reflection and action following this lesson.

- a) Take time to reflect on God's purpose in choosing you. He wants you to be part of his mission, part of the way he will bless all people. Are you trusting God in that, or are you, like Abram, protecting yourself?
- b) Think of a time when you have made decisions to look after yourself without praying and seeking God's will. Can you see how God has acted with grace to you?
- c) The story this week ended with Abram worshipping God. Make time this week to spend time with God by yourself, worshipping him because he is faithful.
- d) Who can you share Abram's story with this week?

*"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him,
who have been called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)*

Notes for the Facilitator

Before the meeting

As the facilitator, please work through the lesson yourself before the meeting.

Beginning of the meeting

Welcome learners and start with prayer. You may want to begin the time by singing a hymn or chorus.

Before starting Lesson 3, ask the learners how they got on with the reflection questions. “How will you respond to God?” from Lesson 2. Some can share what they did. This helps to build accountability and is an encouragement to all. Did anyone share one of Abram’s stories with someone else?

Opening story

Answer: There may be different reactions. Perhaps relieved, if I trusted my uncle. Perhaps sceptical if I didn’t really know him.

Remember that this story is to set the scene for the lesson. It is there to start a conversation and thinking about promises, which will lead to thinking about God and his promise.



Lesson 3: Abram and God's Covenant



Mwai's parents both died when he was 11 years old. His uncle said that Mwai could go and live with him. Mwai was sad and frightened. His uncle seemed to understand, and made an amazing promise: "Mwai, this is now your home. I will be like a father to you. You do not need to worry. You do not need to give me anything. I will look after you, pay your school fees, and provide what you need. When you grow up, if you want to, you can join me in my business."

If you were Mwai, how would you feel receiving this promise?

.....

Genesis 15:1-22

¹ After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision:

'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.'

² But Abram said, 'Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?' ³ And Abram said, 'You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.'

⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to him: 'This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.' ⁵ He took him outside and said, 'Look up at the sky and count the stars – if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.'

⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

⁷ He also said to him, 'I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.'

⁸ But Abram said, 'Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I shall gain possession of it?'

⁹ So the LORD said to him, 'Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.'

¹⁰ Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. ¹¹ Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

¹² As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. ¹³ Then the LORD said to him, 'Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and ill-treated there. ¹⁴ But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterwards they will come out with great possessions. ¹⁵ You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. ¹⁶ In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.'

Notes for the Facilitator

What do you notice in this passage?

A strong trust relationship is growing. God initiates and reassures - he wants Abram to trust him, he wants a deep relationship. Abram trusts God enough to ask tough questions, and puts his trust in God's faithfulness.

- 1) **Answer:** He has promised land, nation and blessing to all. God is faithful to his promise, but it is not yet fulfilled. God initiated the promise.

- 2) **Answer:** So that we can understand why the question of an heir was perplexing and meant so much to Abram. An heir was required to fulfil the promise.

- 3) **Answer:** There is a need for a promise because people have broken relationships with God/self/creation - there is a need for restoration which depends on God's Promise. Only God can solve the problem.



¹⁷When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking brazier with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. ¹⁸On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates – ¹⁹the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, ²⁰Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, ²¹Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.’



What do you notice in this passage?

Think especially about actions and attitudes highlighting **relationships**.



How does this passage connect to God’s Story so far?

This passage is near the beginning of the *God’s Promise*  section of **God’s Story**. It comes after the introduction of **God’s promise** in Genesis 12. The **promise** is not yet fulfilled.

- 1) What have you noted about **God’s promise** so far in this course?

God has shown that he is faithful in keeping his **promise**, as he first guided Abram and Sarai to the Promised Land and then made sure they returned there. His **promise** was of land, a nation, and **blessing** to all, and yet most of this was yet to be experienced.

- 2) In Genesis 15:3 Abram says to God, “You have given me no children ...” As we think about Abram in this passage, why is it important for us to know that he had been given the **promise** of descendants?

Abram knew **God’s promise**. Over the years, he must have asked himself when and how God would fulfil the **promise**. Up to Genesis 15, Abram had no children himself. He was thinking about an heir. Imagining how Abram felt will help us to understand this passage.

God’s **covenant** with Abram brought assurance that God would fulfil his **promise**. The **covenant ceremony** was familiar in the culture of his day.

Covenant ceremony

In Abram’s time, a serious covenant was guaranteed when those making the covenant walked between the pieces of animals cut in two. This showed that if they broke the covenant they would be cut in two like the animals.

To more fully understand this passage, we need to go further back into **God’s Story**.

- 3) Thinking back to *Rebellion* , why is there a need for a **promise** from God?

There was a problem at the end of Genesis 11. People all over the world were rebellious against God’s rule. **Relationships** with God, self, others and all **creation** were broken. They could not fix this problem.

Notes for the Facilitator

4) **Answer:** Good, with flourishing relationships, fruitful, people worshipping him. Peaceful.

5) **Answer:** God is his protection; God is greater than any earthly reward.

6) **Genesis 15:4:** Then the word of the LORD came to him: 'This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.'

Answer: The detail that Abram would definitely have his own son.

7) **Answer:** The vast numbers of his descendants. The incredible reality of God's promise!

8) **Answer: Genesis 15:6:** Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Note: See if any of the group have memorised this verse!

9) **Genesis 15:6:** Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Answer: The gift of righteousness.

Textbox

Righteousness is a key theme throughout the Bible. The definition emphasises that this is a gift. No one can earn their own righteousness, however much they try, because we cannot change our rebellious hearts.



4) Thinking back to *Creation*  , what kind of life do you think God wanted in the Promised Land?

.....

In *Creation*  , we see life flourishing as God intended, with people ruling under God, **worshipping** him, and living in peace with all. This is the kind of life that God was working to restore.



What do you notice about God?

Genesis 15 begins with God's action. God spoke to Abram in a vision. The command not to be afraid indicates that God knew that Abram was afraid in some way. In Genesis 14, we read that Abram had defeated Lot's enemies. He had rescued Lot and the people and possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, but had refused a reward from the King of Sodom.

5) God said, "I am your shield, your very great reward" (Genesis 15:1). What is the meaning of this description of God?

.....

God reassured Abram that he could count on God to protect him. God wanted Abram to realise that knowing God was the best reward he could ever have. A restored **relationship** with God is true **blessing**.

God listened to Abram's concerns and then spoke to Abram again. He gave more detail to the **promise** of Genesis 12:2 about making Abram into a nation.

6) What detail did God add in Genesis 15:4?

.....

Previously there had been no detail about where Abram's nation would come from. Abram reasoned that his servant could be his heir. But God said no, Abram himself would have a son.

7) God told Abram to look at the night sky. What did he want Abram to appreciate?

.....

The illustration of the stars showed the extent of **God's promise** – uncountable descendants! Abram responded to this amazing **promise** by believing God.

8) Copy Genesis 15:6 here and memorise it.

.....

9) What did God give to Abram according to Genesis 15:6?

.....

When God saw Abram's **faith**, he counted Abram as righteous, or credited **righteousness** to Abram. This was a gracious gift of God that could not be earned. No one can ever earn enough **righteousness** to cover their rebellious nature. Salvation, being restored to a right **relationship** with God, is a gift from God.

Righteousness

Righteousness is a gift from God received by faith. It means that we can stand before God and have a right relationship with him.

Notes for the Facilitator

- 10) **Genesis 15:7:** He also said to him, 'I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.'

Answer: God had brought him out of Ur and into Canaan - guided him to the promised land.

- 11) **Answer:** b) God

Note: we are not told directly, but through the imagery.

- 12) **Genesis 15:2-3:** But Abram said, 'Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?' ³ And Abram said, 'You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.'

Answer: See the word "But" at the beginning! Abram seems humble yet complaining? Courageous to bring his problem to God? Some lack of trust at the beginning, trying to find his own solution.

- 13) **Genesis 15:4-5:** Then the word of the LORD came to him: 'This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.' ⁵ He took him outside and said, 'Look up at the sky and count the stars – if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.'

Genesis 15:6: Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Answer: His response was to believe God. To do this, he surrendered his idea/will and accepted God's promise/plan.

- 14) **Genesis 15:7-8:** He also said to him, 'I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.' ⁸ But Abram said, 'Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I shall gain possession of it?'

Answer: He wanted certainty that he really would possess the land. See the word "But" again, at the beginning of verse 8!



God then revealed himself through a statement about his identity and action.

10) What had God already done for Abram (Genesis 15:7)?

.....

God had already proved his commitment to Abram by bringing him out of a land where God was not **worshipped** and into the Promised Land. The **covenant** showed God's on-going commitment.

11) In Genesis 15:9-21, who walked between the slaughtered animals to show their oath to keep the **covenant**? Choose one answer below.

a) Abram

b) God

c) We're not told

In Genesis 15 a blazing torch went between the slaughtered animals. This torch represented God. God himself was making a solemn oath to keep his **covenant**, giving Abram certainty. It was not certainty about exactly how **God's purpose** would work out. Abram's certainty was rooted in the character of God. Normally both **covenant** parties would walk between the animal pieces. Abram did not do that. This **covenant** rests on God's faithfulness alone.

God's timescale

God promised that, after leaving the Promised Land, Abram's descendants would return 400 years later. God does not work as people think he will. But he is faithful.

In Genesis 15:1-22 we see God working by freely confirming his **promises** of descendants and land and guaranteeing them by **covenant**. God also responded to Abram's **faith** with the gift of **righteousness**.



What do you notice about people?

At the beginning of Genesis 15, Abram responded to God speaking to him through a vision. Surprisingly, he did not immediately respond with thanksgiving.

12) Describe Abram's **response** to God in Genesis 15:2-3, thinking about his attitude and feelings.

.....

Abram must have been grateful for God's words, and yet it seems as if this was not enough! The one thing Abram wanted was an heir, and God had not given him a son.

13) After God repeated his **promise** of descendants in Genesis 15:4-5, what was Abram's **response** to God, in Genesis 15:6? Think again about his attitude and feelings.

.....

Abram must have been reassured by God's words. It was an incredible **promise**, given his age and how long he had already waited for a son. He surrendered his own ideas, letting go of his plans, and believed God, even though humanly speaking he had no hope.

Abram had a question about the **promise** of land. He was in Canaan, the Promised Land. But so were the Canaanites.

14) Let's look at the problem. What did Abram want to know (Genesis 15:7-8)?

.....

Abram was looking for certainty that the **promise** of land would be fulfilled. We have seen that God gave him certainty rooted in God's faithfulness. God is faithful to fulfil his purpose in his way. **God's**

Notes for the Facilitator

- 15) **Genesis 17:1:** When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, ‘I am God Almighty, walk before me faithfully and be blameless.

Answer: To live blamelessly before God, and to be faithful. Blamelessly – living a righteous life, not rebelling against God’s ways.

- 16) **Genesis 17:11-12:** You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹² For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner – those who are not your offspring.

Answer: Circumcision for baby boys at 8 days old, and for all males who came into the household to work.

- 17) **Jeremiah 31:33:** ‘This is the covenant that I will make with the people of Israel after that time,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

Answer: God promised to put his law in hearts and minds; he promised a relationship of belonging between him and his people.

- 18) **Deuteronomy 30:6:** The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.

Answer: A circumcised heart is able to love God wholeheartedly, and brings life.



timescale is different from ours and may surprise us. Interestingly, Abram only ever bought a burial cave in the Promised Land (Genesis 23:20).

In Genesis 15:1-22 we see Abram responding honestly to God. He was not afraid to ask questions. He asked with an open mind, wanting to hear God's answers. He also responded by **faith**, knowing that God is faithful.



How does this passage connect to the rest of God's Story?

In Genesis 15 we see that God is a **covenant-making** God. **Covenants** run throughout **God's Story**. God made another **covenant** with Abram in Genesis 17 and added more details to his **promise**. He said that Abram's barren wife Sarai would be the mother of Abram's **promised** son. Genesis 17 also tells us how God expected Abram to live in this **covenant relationship**.

15) How did God expect Abram to live (Genesis 17:1)?

.....

In the beginning, God created people in his **image**. He made people to be like kings under him, reflecting his character and living blamelessly. This is how he **called** Abram to live.

In Genesis 17 God gave Abram a sign as a reminder of the **covenant**. This sign would show that Abram's family was committed to living in a **covenant relationship** with God.

16) What was the sign of the **covenant** and who was it for (Genesis 17:11-12)?

.....

God's purpose is to restore **relationships** with all people. Circumcision included all the men who belonged to the household, whether Abram's descendants or not. However, the Old Testament shows that the physical sign of circumcision did not make people right with God. God gave Abram **righteousness** through **faith**.

Later God made a **covenant** with Abram's descendants, the people of Israel, at Sinai. The Israelites repeatedly broke this **covenant**, failing to live in a **covenant relationship** with God. In his faithfulness, God **promised** a **New Covenant** to fulfil his purpose.

17) What did God **promise** in the **New Covenant** in Jeremiah 31:33?

.....

The **New Covenant** makes it possible to know God and belong to him by **faith**. It is a **promise** of renewed **hearts** with God's law written on them. It is a **promise** of restored **relationships**. The **New Covenant** is for all, male and female, and does not require circumcision of the flesh. Both the Old and New Testaments tell us of circumcised **hearts** instead of bodies.

18) What is the purpose of having a circumcised **heart**, from Deuteronomy 30:6?

.....

God's Story reveals how the **New Covenant** was established by Christ . God circumcises our **hearts** so that we can love God as we were designed to at *Creation* . The Holy Spirit enables us to live in a **covenant relationship** with God. He works in us to transform us into **Christ's image** day by day.

Notes for the Facilitator

19) **Galatians 3:6-7:** So also Abraham ‘believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’

⁷ Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham.

Answer: We too believe God (have faith) and are credited with righteousness.

20) **Answer:** Learners will show different personal responses. Some may be more trusting than Mwai, because God is more faithful than his uncle. Others may be more sceptical if they do not yet know God.

21) **Answer:** Lessons about God: he protects and wants to be close to his people; guarantees his covenant by himself – his faithful character. He is trustworthy.

Lessons about people: Abram surrendered his idea/will and believed/trusted God’s will/promise. Therefore, it is possible for us to do the same. God’s people are called to live blamelessly and faithfully, walking with God.

Final paragraph

This paragraph summarises key points from the lesson.

How will you respond to God?

Encourage participants to reflect on these questions throughout the coming week. Suggest that they come to the next meeting ready to share some of their responses.

Closing verse

This verse has been chosen from the New Testament as a reminder that Abram’s story is part of **God’s Story** and to remind students that Abram’s story points forward.

End of meeting

You may want to sing a hymn or chorus as a response to the lesson. End the meeting in prayer. You may want to encourage each one to pray a short prayer about one thing that has stood out for them from the lesson



Abraham is important throughout **God's Story**. The Jews are Abraham's descendants, and Paul wrote that those who believe are Abraham's children.

19) As Abraham's children, how are Christians like him (Galatians 3:6-7)?

.....

Righteousness is a free gift we receive when we respond to God by **faith**. We are "children of Abraham", not physically, but spiritually when we too have **faith** in **God's promises**.

20) People must respond to God's offer of **righteousness**. How does your **response** compare with the **response** of Mwai in the story at the beginning of the lesson?

.....

Now that we have reached the end of this lesson:

21) What have you learned about God? What have you learned about people?

.....

We have read about *Abram and God's Covenant* from Genesis 15:1-22. By using our six questions we have understood this passage and fitted it into **God's Story**. God is the faithful, **covenant**-keeping God who is committed to fulfilling his purpose for all people. We do not live under the **covenant** of circumcision, but under the **New Covenant** which God put into effect through **Christ**. By **faith** in **Christ**, God freely makes us righteous. Then we learn to love him with all our hearts and to live for him and his purpose.



How will you respond to God?

Here are some suggestions for your own reflection and action following this lesson.

- Consider God inviting you to know him as your very great reward. What does this mean to you? How will you respond to God this week because of these words?
- Have you responded to God in faith and received the righteousness of Christ? Tell somebody else your testimony of what God has done.
- Take a look at the stars this week and worship God for his sovereignty and faithfulness to his promise.
- Which part of this story will you share with someone this week?

*"Consider Abraham:
'He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.'" (Galatians 3:6)*

Notes for the Facilitator

Before the meeting

As the facilitator, please work through the lesson yourself before the meeting.

Please be aware that this lesson contains discussion of barrenness. This could be something that learners are dealing with, so treat the subject with pastoral care.

Beginning of the meeting

Welcome learners and start with prayer. You may want to begin the time by singing a hymn or chorus.

Before starting Lesson 4, ask the learners how they got on with the reflection questions. “How will you respond to God?” from Lesson 3. Some can share what they did. This helps to build accountability and is an encouragement to all. Did anyone share one of Abram’s stories with someone else?

Opening story

A *sing’anga* is a traditional doctor who may use herbal medicines but also “magic” medicines, for example for protection or for cure.

Answer: Note that participants will have a variety of ideas here. It would be good to cover the following answers:

First part of question: the Mbalame family did not fully trust God’s purpose and they were desperate.

Second part of question: Yes, there was a better way. Trust and obey God, even when you cannot see God at work.

Note: this story is to set the scene for the lesson. It is there to start a conversation and thinking about times when we think that God is being slow to act. A key lesson will be that he is with us, even when we do not see answers to our prayers.



Lesson 4: Abram, Sarai and Hagar



Mr and Mrs Mbalame desperately wanted a child. They attended church and had been praying for a child for a long time, but nothing had happened. They felt despised by everyone. They decided that they had to try something else. Together, they went to the sing'anga for charms and did what they were told to do. After some time, a child was born. They went to church to have the child dedicated. But then a deaconess found the charm tied round the baby's waist.

Why do you think the Mbalame family acted the way they did? Was there a better way?

.....

Genesis 16

¹Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; ²so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her."

Abram agreed to what Sarai said. ³So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. ⁴He slept with Hagar, and she conceived.

When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. ⁵Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me."

⁶"Your slave is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.

⁷The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. ⁸And he said, "Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?"

"I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered.

⁹Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." ¹⁰The angel added, "I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count."

¹¹The angel of the LORD also said to her:

"You are now pregnant
and you will give birth to a son.
You shall name him Ishmael,
for the LORD has heard of your misery.

¹²He will be a wild donkey of a man;
his hand will be against everyone
and everyone's hand against him,

Notes for the Facilitator

What do you notice in this passage?

The relationship between God and Abram: is Abram more distant from God again, and listening to his wife more than God?

The relationship between God and Sarai: a poor relationship in which Sarai blames God.

The relationship between God and Hagar: God sees and is gracious to a foreign slave. She hears him and obeys.

- 1) **Genesis 15:4:** Then the word of the LORD came to him: 'This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.'

Answer: Abram already knew that he was going to be the father of his heir.

- 2) **Answer:** It's important to know this, as it gives a reason as to why Abram tried to have a child through another wife. They had not yet recognised Sarai's part in God's Promise, or thought that Sarai could no longer have a part because of her age and barrenness.

- 3) **Answer:** In Genesis 16, both Abram and Sarai are trying to take control over what happens. They are making the decisions, trying to rule themselves. They're not listening to God and submitting to his rule. We see the result of such rebellion in broken relationships, attitudes and actions (blaming others, despising others, jealousy, lack of compassion, injustice). We also see a broken world where barrenness does exist.



and he will live in hostility
toward all his brothers.”

¹³She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: “You are the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have now seen the One who sees me.” ¹⁴That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi^a; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered.

¹⁵So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. ¹⁶Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

^a*Beer Lahai Roi* means “well of the Living One who sees me”.



What do you notice in this passage?

Think especially about actions and attitudes highlighting **relationships**.



How does this passage connect to God’s Story so far?

All of Abram’s story, including Genesis 16, is in the *God’s Promise*  section of **God’s Story**.

- 1) What did Abram already know about the part of **God’s promise** concerning a nation (Genesis 15:4)?

.....

- 2) Why is it important to know this when reading Genesis 16?

.....

God first **promised** to **bless** Abram with a nation in Genesis 12. He did not give details about how this would happen. When he made a **covenant** in Genesis 15, he assured Abram it would be through his own son, but he did not mention Sarai.

God’s promise is about restoring **relationships** for all. God wants people from **all nations** to know him. Hagar came to know God in Genesis 16. “Hagar” means “foreigner.” She was from **Egypt**, not from Abram’s nation.

- 3) Let’s explore the significance of knowing what comes before. What do you see in Genesis 16 that reflects *Rebellion*  ?

.....

.....

Notes for the Facilitator

- 4) **Genesis 2:22-24:** Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. ²³ The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman", for she was taken out of man.' ²⁴ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Answer: God intended marriage between one man and one woman.

- 5) **Genesis 16:2, 5, 6** (relevant parts of verses): ² ... Go, sleep with my slave ... ⁵ ... I put my slave in your arms ... ⁶ 'Your slave is in your hands' ...

Genesis 16:8a: And he said, 'Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?'

Answer: Abram and Sarai both referred to Hagar as "slave" without a name. However, the angel called Hagar by name.

- 6) **Genesis 16:7-12:** The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. ⁸ And he said, 'Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?' 'I'm running away from my mistress Sarai,' she answered.

⁹ Then the angel of the LORD told her, 'Go back to your mistress and submit to her.' ¹⁰ The angel added, 'I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count.' ¹¹ The angel of the LORD also said to her: 'You are now pregnant and you will give birth to a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery. ¹² He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility towards all his brothers.'

Answer: God relates to Hagar with compassion, grace, and as one who rules over all.

- 7) **Genesis 16:10:** The angel added, 'I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count.'

Answer: The promise was that Hagar would have numerous descendants.

- 8) **Answer:** This is similar to the promise God gave to Abram of many descendants.

- 9) **Answer:** By giving God this name, Hagar showed that she understood that she was valued by God. This is amazing, given that she was a foreigner, a slave, and a woman.



The consequences of **rebellion** include suffering, like barrenness and broken **relationships**.

To understand **God's Story**, we need to know about the culture then. In Abram and Sarai's time, the culture had an acceptable way of coping with barrenness.

Now let's look back at *Creation*  and reflect on **God's purpose**.

4) What did God intend for marriage **relationships** (Genesis 2:22-24)?

.....

Unfortunately, due to *Rebellion* , **God's purpose** for marriage between two people has been distorted by human cultures. Every culture, not only Abram's, needs to be evaluated against God's ways.



What do you notice about God?

At the beginning of Genesis 16, it seemed to Abram and Sarai that God was not working. God had **promised** Abram a son, but they did not have a child. We will see how Abram and Sarai responded to this under the next heading, "What do you notice about people?"

God acted when the angel of the LORD appeared to Hagar, Sarai's Egyptian slave girl. Hagar had been used by Sarai to have a son for Abram and Sarai. Hagar was pregnant with Abram's child. However, after she became pregnant, she despised Sarai who then mistreated her.

5) What is the difference between the way Sarai and Abram referred to Hagar (Genesis 16:2, 5, 6) and the way the angel of the LORD addressed Hagar (Genesis 16:8)?

.....

Did you notice that neither Sarai nor Abram used Hagar's name? But God did!

6) How would you describe the way God relates to Hagar in Genesis 16:7-12?

.....

God had not yet appeared to Sarai. But he appeared to a mistreated, foreign, slave girl! He is a God of compassion who values everyone. He graciously gave Hagar her own **promise**.

7) What was the **promise** God gave to Hagar (Genesis 16:10)?

.....

8) What does this remind you of?

.....

Hagar was **promised** many descendants. Later, in Genesis 17:19-21, God clarified that this was different to his **covenant** to Abram about descendants. God's **covenant** to Abram would continue through a child to be born to Sarai.

9) What is the significance of the name that Hagar gave to God, "The God who sees me"?

.....

Notes for the Facilitator

- 10) **Genesis 16:2:** ... so she said to Abram, 'The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her.' Abram agreed to what Sarai said.

Answer: Sarai said that God had kept her from having children. She said this as she was hurt and lived with shame. She wanted someone to blame.

- 11) **Answer:** Maybe because he wanted peace! He also was desperate to have a child, and this gave a solution. But he does not seem to be listening to God at this point, and that was not good.

- 12) **Genesis 16:6:** 'Your slave is in your hands,' Abram said. 'Do with her whatever you think best.' Then Sarai ill-treated Hagar; so she fled from her.

Answer: Abram abdicated his responsibility as head of the household. He did not rule as God rules. He did not make peace and restore relationships.

- 13) **Genesis 16:3:** So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife.

Answer: "took" and "gave"

- 14) **Answer:** b) The fact that she was noticed by God. (The name she gave to God shows this, even more than her response to the promises about Ishmael and descendants.)



Hagar realised that God noticed and valued her. She understood that God knew everything about her. She was not just a foreign female slave to be used by people. God knew her! This must have been life changing.

God is working in Genesis 16! He had not forgotten his **promise** to Abram. Abram and Sarai still had to wait before they would understand that God would fulfil his **promise** of a son through Sarai. God did not reject Hagar and graciously gave Hagar her own **promise** of descendants.



What do you notice about people?

Abram, Sarai and Hagar all responded to God in different ways in Genesis 16.

10) In Genesis 16:2 what did Sarai say that God had done? Why did she say this?

.....

We first learn that Sarai was barren in Genesis 11:30. Her shame was very painful. In Genesis 16, Sarai accused God, saying he was responsible for this.

Genesis 16:2 simply says, “Abram agreed to what Sarai said.” They both knew the cultural solution and felt that they had waited long enough for God to give them a child.

11) Why do you think that Abram agreed with Sarai? What do you think about this?

.....

At this point Abram was looking at a human solution rather than looking to God. So far, God had not specifically said that Sarai would be the mother of Abram’s son, so their solution made sense to them.

Later in Genesis 16, Sarai blamed Abram when Hagar began to despise her. Abram allowed Sarai to do what she wanted to Hagar. Abram abandoned his responsibility for the mother and unborn child.

12) How is Abram’s attitude in Genesis 16:6 different from God’s character and purpose?

.....

Abram did not protect a vulnerable slave or his despised wife. He did not show God’s compassion or work to restore **relationships**. Much suffering came from Abram and Sarai’s decision to exploit Hagar.

There are connections between words in Genesis 3 and Genesis 16 which help us to understand the meaning of the story.

13) In Genesis 16:3, what verbs are used to describe what Sarai did with Hagar?

.....

Genesis 3:6 says that Eve, seeing the fruit, “**took** some and ate it. She also **gave** some to her husband...” Both Eve and Sarai “**took**” something and “**gave**” it to their husband. By using the same words to describe Sarai and Eve’s actions, the Bible indicates that something is wrong. Eve and Sarai were rebelling against God’s way. Neither Sarai nor Abram were waiting for God to fulfil his **promise** in his way. Now let us look at Hagar’s **response** to God.

14) In her encounter with the angel of the LORD, what did Hagar respond to? Choose one answer.

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| a) The promise about her child, Ishmael | b) The fact that she was noticed by God | c) The promise that her descendants would be numerous |
|--|---|--|

Notes for the Facilitator

- 15) **Isaiah 54:1:** ‘Sing, barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labour; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband,’ says the LORD.

Answer: The promise is of many children (and the result is joy).

- 16) **Psalms 13:1-2:** How long, LORD? Will you forget me for ever? How long will you hide your face from me? ² How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?

Answer: He felt that God had forgotten him, and so felt desperate, and frustrated.

- 17) **Psalms 27:14:** Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.

Answer: To wait for God (who will work in his time). Wait with courage, confident in God.

- 18) **Answer:** He found this knowledge a comfort because he was not on his own. This is reassuring – God’s presence in all (good and bad) situations.



The name Hagar gave to God, “The God who sees me,” shows what was most important to her in this painful situation. God took notice of her! She then returned to Abram and Sarai. This must have been difficult, but she now had her own **promise** from God to hold on to.

People responded to God in different ways in Genesis 16. Wondering how God would fulfil his **promise**, Abram and Sarai took matters into their own hands instead of waiting for God. Hagar responded to God’s love and returned to Abram and Sarai. Later she gave birth to a son, Ishmael.



How does this passage connect to the rest of God’s Story?

There is a theme of barrenness in the Bible. We see the barrenness of women like Sarai, Rebekah, Hannah and Elizabeth. We also see the barrenness of land in times of famine. God’s people, when they rebelled against him, are described as barren.

Both physical and spiritual barrenness are a result of living in a broken world because of *Rebellion* . God’s ideal of fruitfulness is clear at *Creation* . From *Rebellion*  on we know that **God’s purpose** is to set all things right. God does not always restore barrenness in our lifetimes, but he will restore all things in the *New Creation* .

15) What is the **promise** to the “barren woman” (the people of Israel) in Isaiah 54:1?

Barrenness is not the end of the story. Those who are barren now may feel shame through no fault of their own. Remember that God’s Son entered a suffering world and was despised. He came to restore all things. We can know the joy of being restored to a **relationship** with God, and the confidence that God’s plan is for honour, abundant joy, and no suffering in the *New Creation* .

Both women in Genesis 16 were hurting. Sarai was barren and shamed. Hagar was a slave, exploited to get a child, and then mistreated. God is revealed here, and throughout **God’s Story**, as one who sees the hurting, and who acts with compassion. People who knew God learned to cry out to God, telling him their hurt and pain. We see examples in the psalms.

16) Read Psalm 13:1-2. How did the psalmist feel about God?

The question, “How long?” is frequently asked by Biblical writers. It expresses pain and frustration but also **faith**. God’s timing is not ours. Genesis 16 is one of many stories of people waiting for God to fulfil his **promises**.

17) What does the Bible encourage us to do in Psalm 27:14?

The psalmist knew God’s goodness, and so he knew that waiting for God was the best, though not always the easiest, **response**.

In Psalm 139:7-10 the psalmist described how he could not be separated from God’s presence.

18) How do you think he felt about God always being present?

Notes for the Facilitator

19) **Answer:** Agree with them that it is hard! But encourage them to wait on God. He is faithful. He loves them and sees their pain.

Note: don't promise that God will give them a child – God does not always choose to answer that way.

20) **Answer:** Lessons about God: he is a gracious promise-maker, and compassionate, seeing and caring for the outcast.

Lessons about people: Abram & Sarai – they had lost sight of God in their grief of not having a child, and went ahead with their idea without asking God about it. It is easy to stop waiting for God!

Hagar – understood that God valued her. Was able to go back into a hard situation because she knew that God cared. All people can know the same thing: God does care about and value each person.

Final paragraph

This paragraph summarises key points from the lesson.

How will you respond to God?

Encourage participants to reflect on these questions throughout the coming week. Suggest that they come to the next meeting ready to share some of their responses.

Closing verse

This verse has been chosen from the Psalms as a reminder that Abram's story is part of **God's Story** and that we are people like Abram, Sarai and Hagar, and can recognise the presence of the same God.

End of meeting

You may want to sing a hymn or chorus as a response to the lesson. End the meeting in prayer. You may want to encourage each one to pray a short prayer about one thing that has stood out for them from the lesson



Remember that Hagar was comforted by recognising that God saw her and understood her situation. God's people throughout history have found the same comfort.

19) Thinking about this lesson, how could you have encouraged Mr and Mrs Mbalame at the beginning of their story?

Remember that in this broken world God does not promise that all those who are married will have children. But God does understand our pain, and he **promises** to be with his people.

Now that we have reached the end of this lesson:

20) What have you learned about God? What have you learned about people?

We have read about *Abram, Sarai and Hagar* from Genesis 16. By using our six questions we have seen where this passage belongs in **God's Story**. It's a very personal story of people struggling because God did not seem to be fulfilling his **promise** quickly enough. This is the experience of many people in **God's Story**. We have been reminded that God is compassionate and gracious. He does not forget people; instead, he sees. His **promise** will be fulfilled, and all suffering and shame redeemed, through **Christ**.



How will you respond to God?

Here are some suggestions for your own reflection and action following this lesson.

- God sees you. He invites you to recognise his presence in every situation. What situation in your life will you bring to God, knowing that he sees?
- What would you have said to Abram if he had told you what he and Sarai were planning? Have you ever been tempted to try to work out a situation by yourself instead of waiting for God to give an answer? What would you now say to yourself in that situation?
- Read through Psalm 139 and use it to worship the God who sees and knows and loves you. This same God has freely brought you into his family through faith.
- Who in your community might feel side-lined or is mistreated? How can you show them God's love and compassion this week, as God showed to Hagar?

*"Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?" (Psalm 139:7)*

Notes for the Facilitator

Before the meeting

As the facilitator, please work through the lesson yourself before the meeting.

Beginning of the meeting

Welcome learners and start with prayer. You may want to begin the time by singing a hymn or chorus.

Before starting Lesson 5, ask the learners how they got on with the reflection questions. “How will you respond to God?” from Lesson 4. Some can share what they did. This helps to build accountability and is an encouragement to all.

Opening story

The point of this story is to introduce the theme of intercession. It is important to know that everyone is able to intercede for others. Although it is always good to ask others to pray too, God listens to the prayers of those the world thinks are unimportant.

Answer: It could be an interesting insight to hear participant’s responses here. Hopefully some will say that Esnat can pray (intercede) for her daughter herself, for God loves her and knows her need. She can ask others to pray with her too.



Lesson 5: Abraham Intercedes



Esnart was afraid of God. He was so powerful, so big and far away! Esnart's young daughter was very sick, and Esnart did not know what to do. Why would God listen to her prayers? She would have to find a well-known pastor who would pray for her daughter. Surely God would listen more to a holy man's prayers.

How would you advise Esnart?

.....

Genesis 18:16-33

Note: Genesis 18:1-15 tells us that Abraham received three special visitors. Abraham asked Sarah to prepare a meal for them, and they ate. Let's continue the story from there.

¹⁶When the men got up to leave, they looked down towards Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. ¹⁷Then the LORD said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? ¹⁸Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. ¹⁹For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.'

²⁰Then the LORD said, 'The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous ²¹that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.'

²²The men turned away and went towards Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD.

²³Then Abraham approached him and said: 'Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?

²⁴What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? ²⁵Far be it from you to do such a thing – to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?'

²⁶The LORD said, 'If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.'

²⁷Then Abraham spoke up again: 'Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, ²⁸what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?'

'If I find forty-five there,' he said, 'I will not destroy it.'

²⁹Once again he spoke to him, 'What if only forty are found there?'

He said, 'For the sake of forty, I will not do it.'

³⁰Then he said, 'May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?'

Notes for the Facilitator

What do you notice in this passage?

A much better relationship this week! God and Abraham have a close relationship, with God sharing his plan and Abraham daring to ask repeated questions as he intercedes for others.

- 1) **Genesis 18:18:** Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.

Answer: God had promised land, nation and blessing to all nations (remember Genesis 12:1-3).

- 2) **Genesis 18:16-33** is the passage on page 27.

Answer: Walking righteously with God, and having a good relationship with him (as Abraham does here) comes from *Creation*.

- 3) **Genesis 18:16-33** is the passage on page 27.

Answer: The unrighteousness and grievous sin of Sodom and Gomorrah reflects *Rebellion*. The need for God to judge is because of the rebellion of people against God. God is against violence and injustice.



He answered, 'I will not do it if I find thirty there.'

³¹Abraham said, 'Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?'

He said, 'For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it.'

³²Then he said, 'May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?'

He answered, 'For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.'

³³When the LORD had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.



What do you notice in this passage?

Think especially about actions and attitudes highlighting **relationships**.



How does this passage connect to God's Story so far?

Remember that the whole story of Abraham is in the *God's Promise*  section of **God's Story**. We have seen Abraham's **faith** in the God of the **promise** growing, and this passage shows us more about what his **relationship** with God looked like.

- 1) Let's look at what has happened in *God's Promise*  already. Genesis 18:18 refers to what God had **promised** Abraham. What was this?

God does not forget his **promise**. He is working through Abraham to ultimately **bless all nations**.

- 2) Let's explore the significance of knowing which sections come before. What do you see in Genesis 18:16-33 that reflects *Creation* ?

The God who created the whole world is King of all. He wants all to live under his **blessing**. Living under his **blessing** includes following God's ways.

- 3) What do you see in Genesis 18:16-33 that reflects *Rebellion* ?

God's authority as King also means that he is the Judge. He made clear that **rebellion** against him would result in death. God sees what sin does and ultimately his purpose is to set all things right. This involves judging justly.

Notes for the Facilitator

4) **Answer:** God's answer was, "no!". God is being open, trusting Abraham with his plan, sharing his heart, drawing Abraham into a deeper relationship.

5) **Answer:** b) A true promise.

6) **Answer:** God's word is trustworthy! When he gives a promise, he will fulfil it (in his time). This is in contrast to people, who might express hope or might promise something they can never do.

7) **Genesis 18:20-21:** Then the LORD said, 'The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous ²¹ that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.'

Answer: His response to the outcry was to go down and investigate what was happening. Note that God does know all things, but here Abraham was allowed to see in a very visible way how God acts. The process of investigating, and being seen to do this, is part of the overall deliverance of justice.

Note: Learners may ask about the "outcry". The question is not focussing on that, but on God's response. The outcry could be from those suffering injustice and oppression. In Genesis 4:10, God said that Abel's blood cried out to him from the ground. Even the evidence left from murder an injustice cries out to God!

8) **Answer:** 6 times (v.26; v.28b; v.29b; v.30b; v.31b; v.32b)

9) **Answer:** God is gracious, he is righteous, he is willing to respond to the pleas of his friends (whilst keeping to his character and purpose). He is also merciful. He does not delight in the wicked dying (Ezekiel 33:11)



What do you notice about God?

Genesis 18:16-33 is an amazing story, showing God walking and talking with Abraham. We see a close **relationship** between them. In Genesis 18:17-21 God was talking to himself!

- 4) God said in Genesis 18:17, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?” What do you think God’s answer to his own question was? Why would he answer this way?

.....

God has no need to tell people what he will do, yet he desired to share with Abraham!

- 5) God said, “Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him” (Genesis 18:18). How would you describe these words?

- a) What might happen b) A true promise c) Something that won’t happen

- 6) What is the significance of your answer to question 5?

.....

God said these things will “surely” happen. We can have confidence that his **promises** will be fulfilled.

- 7) God heard an “outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah” (Genesis 18:20-21). What was his response?

.....

In Genesis 19:1 we see that the ones who went down to see Sodom on behalf of God were the angels who had appeared as men to Abraham. They saw the extent of the evil in Sodom (see Genesis 19).

Note that God is not an unjust judge. He hears cries against sin and judges justly, understanding the whole situation. Genesis 18 neither describes the judgement nor the sin. However, there is a difference between the righteous and the unrighteous.

- 8) God entered into a conversation with Abraham. How many times did he respond to Abraham’s questioning between Genesis 18:23 and 18:32?

.....

- 9) Reflecting on this number, how would you describe God’s character?

.....

The repetition of questions and answers, six times, shows God’s amazing **grace** and patience.

God is working in Genesis 18 to deepen Abraham’s **relationship** with him. He was revealing his plans, and promising to save the righteous when he judges the wicked. He was showing both his **justice** and his compassion, and his desire to have a close **relationship** with his people.

Notes for the Facilitator

- 10) **Genesis 18:19:** For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.'

Answer: God expected Abraham to rule under God, in the image of God: showing his children and household God's ways; doing what is right and just.

Note: reinforce key themes from Creation by using phrases like ruling under God, being made in the image of God. This is a reminder that the whole story of the Bible holds together.

- 11) **Genesis 18:23-25:** Then Abraham approached him and said: 'Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? ²⁵ Far be it from you to do such a thing – to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?'

Answer: He knew that God is righteous, and the Judge of all.

Textbox

It may be worth pointing out that intercession is only one type of prayer.

- 12) **Genesis 18:16-33** is the passage on page 27.

Answer: Abraham did not ask for God to punish the wicked. He did not seek revenge on them. He knew that God would punish the wicked. This was God's job, not his.

- 13) **Answer:** Abraham was persistent. He was concerned for others (the righteous). He was not afraid to keep on approaching God in prayer – for he had come to know God's gracious character.



What do you notice about people?

In Genesis 18:16-33 Abraham was alone with God. We see their remarkable conversation. We also see **God's purpose** for Abraham, including how God wanted Abraham to act.

God chose Abraham with a purpose.

10) How did God expect Abraham to respond to him and live (Genesis 18:19)?

.....

Abram lived before God gave the written law. Nevertheless, God expected him to live righteously. God himself is just and righteous, so Abram was to be like God, reflecting God's **image**. This is what God created people to be like at *Creation* .

God chose to involve people in the working out of his **promise**. When Abraham was living rightly and justly his character would point to God. Other people would be **blessed** as they experienced God's goodness through Abraham.

11) Abraham appealed to God because he knew God. What did he know about God (Genesis 18:23-25)?

.....

Abraham had been walking with God for many years. He had learned about God's righteous character and knew what God desired.

Abraham knew that his relative Lot, together with Lot's family, lived in Sodom (Genesis 13:12). He responded to God's **righteousness** by **interceding** for the righteous, presumably thinking of his family.

Intercession

To intercede is to plead on behalf of someone else. It is one type of prayer.

12) Genesis 18:16-33 assumes there are righteous and wicked people. What do you notice about what Abraham says about the wicked?

.....

Abraham talked a lot about God's character and **interceded** for the righteous, but he did not say very much about the wicked. He knew that God would judge them with **justice**.

13) From this conversation with God, how would you describe Abraham's character?

.....

Abraham's **intercession** reflected God's **image**, showing his concern for the righteous. He was both bold in approaching God and respectful and humble in his requests.

Abraham responded to God's character as he **interceded** for others. As Abraham responded to God's love for him by **interceding** for others, he became a **blessing** to others. This is what God had **promised** he would be in Genesis 12:3.

Notes for the Facilitator

- 14) **Matthew 5:14-16:** ‘You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.’¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Answer: Jesus’ disciples are the light of the world and they are to shine before other people, showing good deeds.

- 15) **Genesis 18:16-33** is the passage on page 27.

Answer: This passage shows God as judge, judging the wicked but rescuing the righteous. This will be seen in God’s righteous judgement at the end of **God’s Story**.

- 16) **Answer:** God loves everyone that he has made. He gives opportunities to repent so that he does not have to carry out his righteous judgement.

- 17) **Romans 8:26-27:** In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.

Romans 8:34: Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Answer: The Holy Spirit, and Christ Jesus, both intercede for us. This is amazing – for we know they will intercede in accordance with God’s will, and that God will certainly fulfil his will.

- 18) **1 Timothy 2:1-2:** I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people – ² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

Matthew 5:44: But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ...

Answer: We are to intercede for everyone! Kings and those in authority, those who persecute us, and others shown as examples in other verses. For example, our city, church, family, work colleagues, those who have not heard of Christ.



How does this passage connect to the rest of God's Story?

In Genesis 18:18 we again see **God's promise** to **bless** all peoples through Abraham and his descendants. This **promise** runs through the whole Bible and is being fulfilled in *Christ*  and *God's Mission* . **God's promise** to **bless** others is linked to how God's people are to live. Abraham was **called** to be just and righteous so that others would be **blessed**. So are we! Throughout the Bible we see non-Jews being attracted to God, and **blessed**, through the lives of God's people.

14) In Matthew 5:14-16 how did Jesus describe his disciples to show how we should live?

.....

This is *God's Mission* . Christians live as lights pointing to Jesus so that other people will see God and be **blessed** by coming to know God.

The final section of **God's Story**, *New Creation* , is summarised with these words: "God's Son Jesus will return as King to judge and set all things right, by finally punishing all evil."

15) Let's explore the significance of knowing the final part of **God's Story**. What do you see in Genesis 18:16-33 that points to the final section?

.....

In Genesis 18:25 Abraham calls God the "Judge of all the earth". God's judgement is necessary to set all things right after *Rebellion*  though it does not always happen in our lifetimes. There will be a final judgement at the end of **God's Story**.

16) God takes "no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezekiel 33:11). Why is this?

.....

God's character has not changed. He longs for people to turn back to him, love him and know him. We should remember that we were once far from God and deserved God's judgement but have instead received God's **mercy** through *Christ* . The Judge of all the earth will not now condemn us. He knows though, that we often find life hard and need help.

17) Who is **interceding** for us (Romans 8:26-27, 34)? What is the significance of this?

.....

The Son of God, who died for us and gave us his **righteousness**, does not leave us helpless. He himself pleads for us to his Father and so does the Holy Spirit.

18) **Christ intercedes** for us; Abraham **interceded** for others. Who are we to **intercede** for? For example, see 1 Timothy 2:1-2 and Matthew 5:44. (There are also many other verses on this.)

.....

.....

This is a long list! As we follow **Christ**, we will learn to be like him and will grow in our compassion for others. We will even learn to pray for those who are against us! God gives us the Holy Spirit who helps us to pray (Romans 8:26-27).

Notes for the Facilitator

19) **Answer:** Tell her that Jesus loves her and is himself interceding for her and her daughter! And that she herself can intercede for her daughter because God values her and will listen to her. Jesus calls his disciples his friends. If she trusts him, he will be with her, listen to her, and comfort her. She can pray for her daughter as well as asking others to pray.

20) **Answer:** Lessons about God: he is gracious, faithful to his purpose, a righteous judge, a listener, and one who is moved by his friend's requests.
Lessons about people: Abraham was bold in prayer, yet still humble. He based his prayer on who he knew God to be. We can do the same.

Final paragraph

This paragraph summarises key points from the lesson.

How will you respond to God?

Encourage participants to reflect on these questions throughout the coming week. Suggest that they come to the next meeting ready to share some of their responses.

Closing verse

This verse has been chosen from the New Testament as a reminder that Abram's story is part of **God's Story** and continues the theme of intercession with the amazing truth that Christ Jesus intercedes for us.

End of meeting

You may want to sing a hymn or chorus as a response to the lesson. End the meeting in prayer. You may want to encourage each one to pray a short prayer about one thing that has stood out for them from the lesson.



Abraham's friendship with God is shown in Genesis 18:16-33. We see an honest conversation, trust, and love. What an amazing thing, to be called God's friend! And that is what Jesus called his disciples (John 15:15). All of Jesus' disciples have the privilege of **interceding** for others to God.

19) How would you help Esnart (see the beginning of the lesson) from this lesson?

.....

Now that we have reached the end of this lesson:

20) What have you learned about God? What have you learned about people?

.....

.....

.....

We have read about *Abraham Intercedes* from Genesis 18 in the *God's Promise*  section of **God's Story**. By using our six questions we have seen where this passage belongs in **God's Story**. At *Creation*  God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden. *Rebellion*  broke that walk, that fellowship with God. Like Abraham we are declared righteous by **faith**. Because of *Christ*  we are reconciled to God. We can respond to God's **grace** by walking and talking with God. We can be a **blessing** to others as we point them to God by our lives, and as we **intercede** for them, living out *God's Mission*  until God finally sets all things right in the *New Creation* .



How will you respond to God?

Here are some suggestions for your own reflection and action following this lesson.

- What is going on in your church just now? In your city? In your country? In the world? God invites you to speak with him about it! Plan to meet with a group of friends to intercede with God for people in these situations.
- How can your life be a light to people who don't know Jesus?
- Are you a friend of God? What difference does that make in your life? Worship God for this incredible privilege!
- Who will you share this story with this week?

"Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." (Romans 8:34)

Notes for the Facilitator

Before the meeting

As the facilitator, please work through the lesson yourself before the meeting. You will probably want to make sure that you cover the Conclusion in the same meeting, so think through the timing of the meeting.

Beginning of the meeting

Welcome learners and start with prayer. You may want to begin the time by singing a hymn or chorus.

Before starting Lesson 6, ask the learners how they got on with the reflection questions. “How will you respond to God?” from Lesson 5. Some can share what they did. This helps to build accountability and is an encouragement to all.

Opening story

The point of this story is to introduce the theme of sacrifice.

Answer: Gift and Mercy are willing servants of God, excited to serve him although it means giving up the way of life they are accustomed to. They are thankful to God for all he has done for them. They are courageous and obedient.



Lesson 6: Abraham and Sacrifice



Gift and Mercy knelt at the front of the church as their pastor and the elders prayed for them. They felt an amazing sense of peace even though everything was about to change. They were leaving their jobs in the city, leaving their parents and community, leaving a comfortable life with electricity and water. They were about to move to a remote village where there were no Christians and where the climate would be much hotter. Some of their friends thought they were very strange, even stupid. But Gift and Mercy were sure this was the right thing to do.

How would you describe Gift and Mercy?

.....

Genesis 22:1-18

¹ Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!'

'Here I am,' he replied.

² Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son, whom you love – Isaac – and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain that I will show you.'

³ Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. ⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵ He said to his servants, 'Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.'

⁶ Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, ⁷ Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, 'Father?'

'Yes, my son?' Abraham replied.

'The fire and wood are here,' Isaac said, 'but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?'

⁸ Abraham answered, 'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.' And the two of them went on together.

⁹ When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, 'Abraham! Abraham!'

'Here I am,' he replied.

Notes for the Facilitator

What do you notice in this passage?

A deep trust between Abraham and God, and between Isaac and Abraham. A relationship in which Abraham worships and obeys God.

- 1) **Genesis 22:1-18** is the passage on page 33-34.

Answer: Knowing that the promise is through Isaac increases the tension in the story. It makes the proposed sacrifice harder to understand; and it makes Abraham's obedience much more difficult.

- 2) **Genesis 22:1-18** is the passage on page 33-34.

Answer: There are several echoes of *Creation*. For example, worship and God's provision. Also, the close relationship between Abraham and God. The promise of blessing reflects the creation mandate to go and multiply.

- 3) **Genesis 22:1-18** is the passage on page 33-34.

Answer: It is harder to see how *Rebellion* is reflected in this story. However, the sacrifice reminds us that sacrifice is needed because of our rebellion.

¹² ‘Do not lay a hand on the boy,’ he said. ‘Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.’

¹³ Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, ‘On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.’

¹⁵ The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time ¹⁶ and said, ‘I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, ¹⁸ and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.’



What do you notice in this passage?

Think especially about actions and attitudes highlighting **relationships**.



How does this passage connect with God’s Story so far?

Genesis 22:1-18 is in the *God’s Promise*  section of **God’s Story**. Let’s look at what has happened in this section already. God had **promised** Abraham a great nation and said that Abraham himself would have a son. Abraham had a son, Ishmael, through Hagar, but he was not the **promised** son. God had made it clear in Genesis 17:19-21 that his **covenant** would be established through Isaac. The birth of Isaac, son of Abraham and Sarah, is recorded in Genesis 21:1-2.

- 1) As we read Genesis 22:1-18, why is it significant to know that God had **promised** Abraham that his **covenant** would continue through Isaac?

The command to **sacrifice** Isaac brings tension. How could Abraham **sacrifice** the son who was to have children according to **God’s promise**? How could his righteous God demand such a sacrifice? Humanly speaking, it made no sense. We truly see the extent of Abraham’s **faith** in **God’s purposes**.

Let’s explore the significance of knowing which sections of **God’s Story** come before.

- 2) What do you see in Genesis 22:1-18 that reflects *Creation*  ?

Abraham is living in a close **relationship** with God, **worshipping** him. This is what God intended at *Creation* .

- 3) What do you see in Genesis 22:1-18 that reflects *Rebellion*  ?

In *Rebellion* , God made the first **sacrifice** after Adam and Eve sinned, clothing them with an animal skin. **Sacrifice** is a reminder of **rebellion** and the need to deal with sin.

Notes for the Facilitator

- 4) **Answer:** God was looking to see that Abraham feared him; that he would surrender to him as King by trusting him.

- 5) **Genesis 22:2:** Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son, whom you love – Isaac – and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain that I will show you.'

Genesis 22:12: 'Do not lay a hand on the boy,' he said. 'Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.'

Answer: "your son, your only son". This is significant because Isaac is the only carrier of God's promise to make Abram into a great nation. Isaac needs to live to have children as Abraham's descendants.

- 6) **Answer:** A ram. This is a substitute for Isaac, meaning that Isaac does not need to die.

- 7) **Genesis 12:1-3:** The Lord had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. ² 'I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'

Genesis 22:18: and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.'

Answer: The promise that all peoples, or nations, on earth will be blessed. This is very significant, for it means that those who are not Abraham's physical descendants can also know God.

- 8) **Answer:** b) His availability.

- 9) **Answer:** Availability also means that Abraham was surrendered to God's will, willing to do whatever God said.



God seems to be working in a very surprising way in Genesis 22:1-18.

God always works to fulfil his purpose. He loves his people and wants them to love and trust him in return. He invites people to surrender their own wills and trust him completely.

Abraham had another son, Ishmael. However, Isaac was the only son of God's **covenant** with Abraham (Genesis 17:19-21). In order for **God's promise** to Abraham and Sarah to be fulfilled, Isaac needed to grow up and have children. Yet God was asking for Isaac to be **sacrificed**!

This is the first time in the Bible where we see that an animal was **sacrificed** as a substitute for a person. It is clear that this **sacrifice** was God's provision from the name given by Abraham, "The LORD will provide." This is very significant later in **God's Story**.

God has not forgotten his promise! This story is not just about Abraham. God wants all people to know him.

God is working in Genesis 22:1-18. As God tested Abraham, he was inviting Abraham to experience his faithfulness to his purposes. God provided a **sacrifice** and showed his purpose from *Creation*  by repeating his **promise** that **all nations** would be **blessed**, or restored to a **relationship** with God, through Abraham's descendants.



Once again, Abraham responded to God in **faith**.

“Here I am” was his willing **response** to God. He was ready to listen, ready to obey. He was available for God to use in whatever way he chose.

Notes for the Facilitator

- 10) **Genesis 22:2-3:** Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son, whom you love – Isaac – and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain that I will show you.' ³ Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.

Answer: Prompt, unquestioning obedience. An immediate response.

- 11) **Hebrews 11:17-19:** By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, ¹⁸ even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' ¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death. .

Answer: "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead". That is, even if Isaac died, God must be able to raise him in order to continue the promise.

- 12) **Answer:** Gratitude that he was offering a ram instead of Isaac; as a way of worshipping God and expressing his commitment to God.

- 13) **Answer:** Because people so easily forget! Remembering God's provision links to *Creation* and is a reminder that God has given all that we need. It's a reminder of God's character of love and grace and generosity.

- 14) **Answer:** The sacrifice of Christ, God's only Son.



10) How would you describe the **response** of Abraham to God in Genesis 22:2-3?

Abraham showed great **faith** in God by being willing to give up his hope that **God's promise** would be fulfilled through Isaac in the way that he had imagined. It is amazing that he immediately obeyed God!

In Genesis 22:8, Abraham said to Isaac, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering." At no point did Abraham hesitate or stop from the process of offering Isaac. He went forward in obedience and trust. The writer of the book of Hebrews helps us to understand why Abraham did this.

11) What is the reason given in Hebrews 11:17-19 that Abraham was prepared to offer Isaac?

Abraham needed Isaac to fulfil **God's promise**. Abraham had **faith**, despite his life experience, that God could raise the dead!

God did not explicitly ask Abraham to offer another **sacrifice** after he stopped him from sacrificing Isaac.

12) Why do you think that Abraham offered the ram as a burnt offering?

We have seen that Abraham was a man who **worshipped** God. In this story he was quick to **worship** and give thanks to the God who had provided a **sacrifice** to fulfil his **promise**.

Abraham called that place "The LORD will Provide." He, and those following after him, would be reminded of God's provision.

13) Why was it important to remember God's provision?

From *Creation*  God has provided all that his **creation** needs. In *God's Promise*  we see that God provides a way to restore **relationships**. When people remember God's provision, they **worship** him. When people do not remember they are likely to depend on themselves and rebel against God.

Abraham responded to God in willing **faith** and obedience. In doing so, he experienced God's love and grace. As he followed God and walked with God, he was **blessed** in his **relationship** with God and became a **blessing** to other people.



How does this passage connect to the rest of God's Story?

The theme of **sacrifice** runs throughout **God's Story**. For example, in Exodus, the Passover Lamb was **sacrificed** to save God's people. In Leviticus instructions about regular **sacrifices** were given to God's people. **Sacrifices** were God's way for his people to be restored to him. Animals died in the place of people, taking the punishment people deserved. However, animal **sacrifices** were never enough to cover all sin and **rebellion**. God was preparing the way for a greater **sacrifice**.

14) What greater **sacrifice** do you think the story in Genesis 22 is pointing to?

Notes for the Facilitator

15) **Answer:** Sacrifice of an only son; willing surrender of those involved; location: Mount Moriah / Jerusalem; a sacrificial lamb/ram. Isaac and Jesus both carried wood to the sacrifice.

16) **Matthew 28:18-20:** Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

Answer: The purpose is to make disciples of all nations.

17) **Mark 8:34:** Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.'

Answer: He is looking for the willingness to surrender all to him. An attitude of self-denial. Being Christ-centred not self-centred, which may include hardship. Giving up what we see as our "right to rule our lives" and placing ourselves under the Kingship of Christ.

18) **Answer:** It is significant because it shows the reversal of rebellion. It is surrendering to God as our King, and gladly accepting his Lordship and rule over our lives.

19) **Answer:** Gift and Mercy have given up their "right" to a comfortable life. They will face hardship – but they are serving their King and believe that he will provide all that they need.



Genesis 22 powerfully points to the greatest of all **sacrifices**, explained in the *Christ*  section of **God's Story**.

15) What similarities do you see between Genesis 22 and the **sacrifice** of **Christ**?

Mount Moriah <i>Moriah was the place chosen by God for the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is later known as Zion.</i>	God, like Abraham, was prepared to sacrifice his only son. Jesus was called the Lamb of God. He died as a sacrifice for our sins outside Jerusalem, the same mountain as Genesis 22. Through Christ's sacrifice people from all nations can be restored to a relationship with God. This is the message going out through <i>God's Mission</i>  and that will finally be realised in the <i>New Creation</i> .
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God always has his purpose in mind. That is for the restoration of all things! *God's Promise*  that **all nations** will be **blessed**, repeated in Genesis 22:18 from Genesis 12:3, forms the background to *God's Mission* .

16) What is the purpose of the **mission** that Jesus gave to his disciples in Matthew 28:18-20?

God is continuing to work through his people in order to reach people of **all nations** with the good news of restoration.

God worked through Abraham who was willing to follow God's will when it did not make sense. Throughout **God's Story** God is looking for those who will follow him.

17) What attitude is Jesus looking for in his followers (Mark 8:34)?

The followers of Jesus are those who say that Jesus is their Lord. This means a willingness to do what he asks us to do, and to deny ourselves, letting go of what we want to do.

18) How is this attitude significant in **God's Story** where people rebelled and became their own kings?

We surrender our own wills (our desire to be kings in God's place) and submit to the rule of God. Following God may well involve suffering, but he will always be faithful to his purpose and we can trust him.

19) Think about Gift and Mercy in the story above. Why do you think they were sure about serving God?

Notes for the Facilitator

20) **Answer:** Lessons about God: He provides all that we need – ultimately the sacrifice that reconciles us to himself, restoring relationships. He calls his people to be whole-hearted in their commitment and service to him, to acknowledge that he is King.

Lessons about people: Abraham had deep trust in God resulting in obedience, putting God as “number one” in his life. This is an example for us to follow as we follow Christ with the same willing surrender.

Final paragraph

This paragraph summarises key points from the lesson.

How will you respond to God?

Encourage participants to reflect on these questions throughout the coming week. Note that for this meeting there are two boxes with “how will you respond to God” questions. The second comes in the conclusion.

Closing verse

This verse has been chosen from the New Testament as a reminder that Abram’s story is part of **God’s Story**. This verse sums up this lesson well!

Conclusion

Make sure you continue into the conclusion with the learners.



Now that we have reached the end of this lesson:

20) What have you learned about God? What have you learned about people?

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We have read about *Abraham and Sacrifice* from Genesis 22. By using our six questions we have seen where this passage belongs in **God's Story**. It shows God's desire for a deep **relationship** of trust with his people. This can only happen when we give up our desire to rule and accept him as our Lord and King. This passage shows how, right at the beginning of the Bible, God was already planning for a greater **sacrifice** in order to bring restoration and fulfil his **mission** to restore all peoples to a **relationship** with him. As Abraham discovered, God is faithful to his **covenant** and provides all that we need. Like Abraham we need to respond to God with whole-hearted, willing obedience, trusting him with our lives.



How will you respond to God?

Here are some suggestions for your own reflection and action following this lesson.

- a) God invites you to join him on his mission to bless all nations. Are you willing to say, "Here I am"? Who can you befriend and tell about Jesus?
- b) Spend time in prayer and quiet before God, reflecting on your life. What will it look like for you to be a living sacrifice this week?
- c) Abraham offered a burnt offering to God, worshipping Him. As you worship this week, focus on thanking God for Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.
- d) Who can you share Abraham's story with this week?

*"By faith Abraham, when God tested him,
offered Isaac as a sacrifice" (Hebrews 11:17a)*

Notes for the Facilitator

Guiding questions

It is good for you to review these questions with the learners. In the workbook, each of these main questions has had many sub-questions. Here, learners can see the central questions.

Remind them that these questions are built around **God's Story**. This is found on page 3 if you want to refer to it.

Please encourage them to use these questions when they read the Bible.

1) *Note: if your group is likely to see each other again, you could suggest they work through the passages in this question and share their findings with people in the group another time.*

2) **Answer:** each person will have their own key lessons! It would be good if these included something about who God is; about Abraham and our relationship with God; about using **God's Story** to help understand passages; about using guiding questions in Bible study.



Conclusion

We have looked at *Abraham in God's Story* by using six guiding questions. These have helped us to understand that it is part of **God's Story**.

	• What do you notice in this passage?
	• How does this passage connect to God's Story so far?
	• What do you notice about God?
	• What do you notice about people?
	• How does this passage connect to the rest of God's Story?
	• How will you respond to God?

These questions can be used any time you read a Bible passage. They will help you to understand God's word in the light of **God's Story**.

- Practice using the above six questions with some of the passages about Abraham that we did not cover. For example:
 - Genesis 13:5-28
 - Genesis 14:11-24
 - Genesis 21:8-21

You might like to discuss your findings with members of your group.

As we have looked at *Abraham in God's Story* we have seen people's **responses** to God.

- What key lessons will you take from this course?

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Notes for the Facilitator

Summary of God's Story

This summary is a different way of rehearsing the story, using key words, and referring to Abraham and our part in the story.

You may like to get learners to see if they can give a version of **God's Story** within 1 minute, using the 6 parts and key words.

QR code

The QR code takes you to TEEnet's website. As well as courses, this contains blog posts you may find interesting.

End of meeting

You may want to sing a hymn or chorus as a response to the lesson. End the meeting in prayer. You may want to encourage each one to pray a short prayer about one thing that has stood out for them from the whole course.



Over the lessons we have seen ideas and words that come again and again in Scripture. Here is another way of telling **God's Story** using some of these key words.

We have seen *God's Promise*  which shows the **purpose** he had from *Creation*  to enjoy good **relationships** with people from **all nations** in the world which he made. The purpose is for all to live in peace and under **God's blessing**.

We have been reminded how the *Rebellion*  broke the good **relationships** that God made. God always works to bring people back into a right **relationship** with him. He **brings us out** of darkness and into light. We looked forward in the story and saw that this is what *Christ*  has done. When people **respond** to him in **faith** he gives the gift of **righteousness**. This is **free**, by his **grace**.

God **invites** his people – Abraham then, and us now – to take part in his **plan** so that his **promise** will be **fulfilled**. This is *God's Mission* . He **invites** us to walk in his ways and to reflect his **image** as we were created to do, as **kings** under him.

Will you, like Abraham, say, “Here I am” to God? Who will be **blessed** by being brought into a **relationship** with God because of you? One day we will **worship** with them in the *New Creation* .



If you enjoyed this course, you can find more at <https://teenet.org/tee-courses/>

The Story of God and His World is the foundational course. It is a good way to learn the whole of **God's Story**.





Glossary

All nations	<i>God wants all people everywhere to turn to him and be reconciled to him. We see this in God's promise. We sometimes talk about all peoples or all families on earth instead.</i>
Blessing	<i>True blessing is linked to God's purpose. True blessing is a good relationship with God, serving and worshipping him, and enjoying peace with God, self, others and all creation.</i>
Call	<i>God "calls" people for a specific purpose. Genesis 12 is the call of Abram, when God called him to take part in his plan of restoration. When God speaks to us he invites us to know him, to listen, obey, and take part in his mission.</i>
Christ	<i>This is the title for the One God promised: one anointed to be King, who will bring victory and will reign forever. In this course "Christ" also refers to the fourth section of God's Story.</i>
Covenant	<i>A covenant is an agreement between two groups, in which each agrees to behave in a certain way to maintain the relationship.</i>
Covenant ceremony	<i>In Abram's time, a serious covenant was guaranteed when those making the covenant walked between the pieces of animals cut in two. This showed that if they broke the covenant they would be cut in two like the animals.</i>
Creation	<i>Everything that God has made. In this course "creation" is the first section of God's Story. At creation God's purpose for all is established.</i>
Egypt	<i>Ruled by the Pharaohs, Egypt was sometimes a place of refuge in the Bible. But the Egyptians worshipped other gods and often opposed God's people. Later God warned his people not to go there.</i>
Faith	<i>Faith is trusting in the promises of God.</i>
God's mission	<i>God's mission is to bring restoration to all. He invites others to join him on his mission. In this course it is also the name given to a main section of God's Story.</i>
God's promise	<i>The promise of God is in the whole of God's Story. He is working to finally fulfil this when people from every nation will worship and serve him in the new creation. It is also the name given to a main section of God's Story.</i>
God's purpose	<i>From the beginning, God had a purpose for everyone to live in peace with God, self, others and all creation, and to worship him. This purpose runs through God's Story and is seen as God works to restore relationships.</i>
God's Story	<i>We use "God's Story" as a way of describing the Bible story. It is the big story, the overall story from Genesis to Revelation.</i>
God's timescale	<i>God promises that, after leaving the Promised Land, Abram's descendants will return 400 years later. God does not work as people think he will. But he is faithful.</i>
Grace	<i>God shows grace when he gives us the good that we do not deserve.</i>
Heart	<i>In the Bible, the heart is the essence of the person, the centre of a person's thoughts, decisions and will.</i>



Image	<i>God created people in his image. When his people walk with him they reflect his image. However, God's image in us is broken by rebellion. Christ is the true image of God. In God's Story God works to restore his image in us.</i>
Intercession	<i>To intercede is to plead on behalf of someone else. It is one type of prayer.</i>
Justice	<i>To say that God is just is to say that all he does is right and true. He works for justice – for evil to be dealt with and all things to be set right.</i>
Love	<i>God is love; and his love is good, unfailing and faithful. God is love; and his love is good, unfailing and faithful. We love in response to God's love.</i>
Mercy	<i>Mercy is when God does not give us the punishment we deserve.</i>
Mount Moriah	<i>Moriah was the place chosen by God for the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is later known as Zion.</i>
New Covenant	<i>God promised the New Covenant to restore relationships, promising to give forgiveness and renewed hearts, and the presence of his Spirit. The promise was fulfilled when Christ established the New Covenant by his death.</i>
New Creation	<i>Creation was broken by rebellion. Christ brings restoration. New Creation began with Christ's resurrection. When he comes again, God will set all things right. In this course New Creation refers to the final section of God's Story. God's people will be fully restored and live with God.</i>
Polygamy	<i>Pharaohs often had several wives and concubines. This included foreign wives to strengthen political alliances.</i>
Rebellion	<i>All people have rebelled against God. Rebellion is the attitude of the heart, against God's kingship, which separates us from God. Rebellion affects all our relationships (with God, self, other people and creation) and causes brokenness. The second section of God's Story is called "rebellion," but that rebellion continues until today. Our rebellion is the reason we need restoration.</i>
Relationship	<i>In God's Story we read a lot about relationships. Relationships can be good or bad. God wants our relationship with him to grow deeper.</i>
Response	<i>God longs for people to respond to his love. We can respond negatively or positively.</i>
Righteousness	<i>Righteousness is a gift from God received by faith. It means that we can stand before God and have a right relationship with him. It is related to justice.</i>
Sacrifice	<i>Sacrifices were God's way for his people to be restored to him. Animals died in the place of people, taking the punishment people deserved. However, animal sacrifices were never enough to cover all sin and rebellion. God was preparing the way for a greater sacrifice in Christ.</i>
Worship	<i>True worship is giving our lives, all we are and all we do, to God. It shows that only God is worthy and that we want to live for him alone.</i>