

CHAPTER 1 LEADER GUIDE

Chapter 1: Father Abraham

HOST CODE: 246810

TO THE LEADER

Leader Responsibilities

- Pray daily for your group participants.
- Complete the daily assignment along with your participants.
- Participate in the Group Discussion Question on the app.
- Participate in the prayer request board and the message board on the app.
- Monitor all posts on the app and delete any you feel are inappropriate.

Leader Preparation for Group Meeting

- Read the Overview for Leader content for the chapter. Chapter goals, a chapter summary, and biblical background are included.
- Familiarize yourself with the chapter's leader guide to be confident with the content and flow. Fill in the time each section should start based on your chosen session duration and write your summary of the group discussion question in the space provided.

Using the Leader Guide

- Each leader guide is written to be flexible to fit a 60-minute or 90-minute small group session.
- For a 60-minute session, SKIP all questions highlighted in blue.
 - If you have 90 minutes, use the additional information and questions highlighted in blue.
 - The time frames in parentheses (for example, 15 or 30 MINUTES TOTAL) mean that the first number is for a 60-minute session; the second number is for a 90-minute session. (Note: the participants will have answered all the questions whether or not you have time to discuss them. They will have access to all their answers in their Meeting Guide.)
- To plan for your session, write the exact time of day you need to be at each new segment of the session. It is vital that you begin and end your session on the timeframe committed to by your group. This part of your preparation sets you up to stay on schedule.

- Space is left for your summary of responses to the assignment’s group discussion question. Return to the group discussion question before the meeting, read the responses, and summarize.

CHAPTER 1 OVERVIEW FOR LEADER

Chapter Goals

Participants should have the opportunity to:

- describe the idea of “calling” as a matter of faith;
- talk about their own experiences of being “called” to different roles in their lives;
- hear and understand the story of Abraham and Sarah;
- connect the story of Abraham and Sarah to their own lives and calling.

CHAPTER ONE SUMMARY: FATHER ABRAHAM

This book is about ordinary people called by God to do often extraordinary things. As we ponder their stories, perhaps we can better hear God’s voice in our own lives.

In his 70s, Abram (not yet “Abraham”) is called by God to leave his home to follow God to a new land that God promises to him and his descendants. Along the way he and his wife, Sarai (not yet “Sarah”), experience doubt and dismay, infertility and conflict, as well as some tragic mistakes by themselves and others. They also receive assurance from God, and new names to boot, before the child God promises them finally arrives. In the incremental nature of their journey and their continual call to place God at the center of their journey, we can see how God is present to us in our own fitful journeys.

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND FOR THE LEADER

If you can, it is helpful to read the whole story of Abraham in Genesis 12–25 before the group meets. Some of that material is touched on only slightly in the chapter, and some is not touched on at all, but having the whole story in mind can help with context of the specific events for yourself and your participants. It is also possible that some participants may be familiar with the story, have questions about it, and quite possibly find parts of it troubling. The most important passages for the discussion of the chapter are excerpted below.

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

Genesis 12:1-4

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." But Abram said, "O LORD God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." But the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Genesis 15:1-6

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. . . ."

God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"

Genesis 17:1-5, 15-17

So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son." But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "Oh yes, you did laugh."

Genesis 18:12-15

SESSION 1

Introduction and Chapter 1: Father Abraham

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LEADER NOTES

Note: Be sure you have read the content above and prepared your leader guide as directed.

WELCOME AND OPENING PRAYER (10 MINUTES)

Offer a personal welcome.

Take attendance as group members join the meeting.

Ask how the group did completing the Daily Assignment and ask if anyone needs clarification on how to use the app. (If a participant needs more than a quick answer, arrange to talk after the meeting.)

Ask participants to open their app to this session’s Meeting Guide. (Make sure all have found and opened their Meeting Guides before continuing.)

Opening Prayer

Thank you for using the Prayer Request section of the app this week. Please continue to do so throughout this Study. *(Feel free to comment on any prayer requests or celebrations you read on the app).*

Who will volunteer to open our meeting in prayer, first with the Daily Prayer from this week and then with a prayer for our time together? You will find the Daily Prayer in the **Meeting Opening segment** of your Meeting Guide. Raise your hand to volunteer.

Daily Prayer: “Lord God, you have called your servants to follow your leading to places we can’t yet see and by paths we do not yet know. We pray that you would open our hearts and minds to your voice this day and every day ahead, that we would clearly hear, and faithfully follow your calling to us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.”

INTRODUCTION AND CHAPTER ONE VIDEO DISCUSSION (5 or 10 MINUTES)

Share the following:

As we began this study together, we were given a Group Discussion Question in our Daily Assignment to stir our thoughts.

The question was: “What do you think it means to be called by God?”

Briefly summarize what was shared by participants in the Group Discussion.

Summary of discussion thread:

Share the following:

The author, Susan Robb, of *Called: Hearing and Responding to God's Voice*, begins by declaring that "Everyone who is a Christian is called. We are called to follow Christ's teachings and serve as his disciples. We are called into the ministry of making disciples of Jesus Christ. She continues by saying that "while all who are followers of Christ have the same call, each person is gifted and called in unique ways to live out that call."

+ Have you ever, or are you now struggling to determine if God is placing a particular call on your life? Explain. You'll find the notes you took in the **Large-Group Discussion, Part 1 segment** of your Meeting Guide. (*Hear from 1-2 volunteers.*)

Chapter 1 Video Discussion

Share the following:

In this video, Susan Robb talked about Abraham and Sarah and their journey "by stages" to answer the challenging calling God gave them.

+ You were asked: In what ways do you already feel an affinity to Abraham and Sarah's story? You'll find your answer in the **Large-Group Discussion, Part 1 segment** of your Meeting Guide. (*Take 1-2 answers.*)

EXPLORE "CHAPTER ONE: FATHER ABRAHAM" (10 or 15 MINUTES TOTAL)

Share the following:

Susan tells a story about her husband's ancestors moving from Oklahoma to Texas with "seemingly bling faith." They experience struggles and setbacks. She also speaks about her own ups and downs in answering God's call to ordained ministry.

+ Do you have any family stories of migration? Or have you ever made a big and scary move yourself? How did it work out? What did it mean to you and/or your family? You'll find this question and your answer in the **Large-Group Discussion, Part 1 segment** of your Meeting Guide. (*Hear from 1-2 persons.*)

Let me read God's call to Abram and Sarai in Genesis 12:1-4: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran."

- Susan Robb's former professor calls these four verses from Genesis the linchpin of the entire Bible.
- The verses begin God's relationship of covenant or promise with the descendants of Abraham and Isaac.

- This story comes to include the whole people of Israel, including Jesus, and, through Jesus, the whole Christian church.
- God calls Abraham to leave his home and go to a new land.
- God promises to bless Abraham and make him (and his descendants) a blessing to all the nations of the earth.
- Abraham takes the big step required to follow God’s calling without questioning.
- God promised Abraham offspring, land, and a blessing.

+ What question(s) would you want to ask if you were in Abraham’s situation? You’ll find this question and your answer in the **Large-Group Discussion, Part 1 segment** of your Meeting Guide. *(Hear from 2-3 participants.)*

SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION (15 or 25 MINUTES)

Divide the class into **random breakout rooms of 3-4 participants** and set the countdown clock for **15 or 25 minutes**. Tell participants to choose a small-group leader who will keep the discussion moving.

Tell participants to use the **Small-Group Discussion segment** of their Meeting Guide for content, questions, and answers they saved during their Daily Assignments.

Note: The content of the Small-Group Discussion guide is included at the end of this document.

BREAKOUT ROOM GUIDE				
Participants (excluding leader and co-leader)	15	12-14	9-11	6-8
Breakout rooms needed	5	4	3	2

CONTINUE EXPLORING “CHAPTER ONE: FATHER ABRAHAM” (5 or 10 MINUTES)

Share the following:

A Laughing Matter

Abraham and Sarah are visited by God, either with two divine attendants or a vision of the Trinity. Abraham and Sarah react with extravagant hospitality. The visitors renew the promise of a son to Abraham. Eavesdropping, Sarah laughs.

+ What is your most memorable experience of giving or receiving hospitality? You’ll find this question and your answer in the **Large-Group Discussion, Part 2 segment** of your Meeting Guide. *(Hear from 1-2 participants.)*

+ Why do you think it is important for Abraham and Sarah (and us) to remember this story? You’ll find this question and your answer in the **Large-Group Discussion, Part 2 segment** of your Meeting Guide. *(Hear from 1-2 participants.)*

Abraham and Sarah experienced significant struggles, setbacks, and failures in answering their calling from God. But as the author says, “God is more faithful and patient with us than we are with God.”

Abraham and Sarah had to trust God’s promises and guidance throughout their journey, rather than simply following a plan they fully knew. God proved to be faithful to them, and they became not only ancestors to a great multitude but a blessing to all.

In our own lives we experience struggles, setbacks, and failures, but God still has plans for us.

DISCUSSION IN PAIRS (10 or 15 MINUTES)

Divide the class into **random breakout rooms of 2 participants** and set the countdown clock for **10 or 15 minutes**. Tell participants to use the **Pairs Discussion segment of their Meeting Guide** for answers they saved during their Daily Assignments.

Tell your group whether to discuss the optional questions (if you are conducting a 90-minute session).

Note: Below is the Pairs Discussion Guide:

Susan Robb says, “Sometimes, even when we’re answering God’s call, the journey is difficult and doesn’t seem clear, like traveling over a rocky passage in a covered wagon. We have doubts, reservations, and disappointments, and then something happens to remind us why we should continue pursuing the journey to which we have been called. While we can’t see what lies ahead, we’re reminded that God is faithful and can be trusted with our call. And, sometimes I work through doubts and frustrations by making lists of the blessings God has placed in my life.”

- + *Right now, is there anything you feel God is calling you to do that you are doubting if you should do it? Explain.*
- + *List several ways in which God has been faithful and trustworthy in your life up until now.*
- + *What needs to happen for you to say “yes” to God’s call.*

CLOSING PRAYER (10 MINUTES)

Share the following:

May you be reminded of the closing words of the chapter:

“You are a beloved child of God, descendant of Abraham, set apart for great purposes. You are blessed to be a blessing to others; to show the world the depth of the love of God available to every person. May you listen for the voice of the One who wants to lead you “to the land that I will show you,” trusting God will guide you, step by step, into a bright and unimaginable future.”

At the end of your Daily Assignment, you were prompted to write a Personal Prayer in response to this session's learning. You can find your prayer in the **Meeting Closing segment** of the Meeting Guide. Take a minute now to update your prayer with any new thoughts from your discussions so you will be ready to read your prayer during our closing prayer.

Pause for one minute allowing group to update their prayers.

Remember, your Personal Prayer can be accessed each day in the coming week as you pray the Daily Prayer in the assignment.

For today's closing prayer, I will call on each of you to read your Personal Prayer, and then I will close us in prayer.

(Call on each participant then close with the following prayer.)

"May today there be peace within.
May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.
May you not forget the infinite possibilities born of faith.
May you use those gifts that you have received and pass on the love that has been given to you.
May you be content knowing you are a child of God.
Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise, and love.
It is there for each and every one of us.
Amen." *(attributed to St. Teresa of Avilla)*

<End>

LEADER NOTES

SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

Ask one person to be a timekeeper and plan to spend 2-3 minutes per question for discussion of the assigned questions. Remember, the purpose of the Small-Group Discussion is not just to quickly answer the questions but to take time to share openly your thoughts and feelings. Be sure everyone in the group gets a chance to share.

If time remains after your group concludes the assignment, discuss the optional questions.

You will be transferred back into the main group when the breakout timer runs out.

Doubt and Reassurance

Describe a time when you were frustrated and wanted to give up in a particular situation but didn't. What made you decide to continue?

Even when answering God's calling, Susan Robb says, "We have doubts, reservations, and disappointments, and then something happens to remind us why we should continue pursuing the journey to which we have been called." As you read, God returns to Abraham to renew God's promise to him, giving him and Sarah the assurance they need to continue.

How have you experienced God's assurance when struggling to answer God's calling? (Consider: the challenge of caring for a new baby, the difficulty of adjusting to a new job or a new community, or the struggles of completing a degree or professional program...)

Impatience and Dysfunction

Abram and Sarai experience a dilemma. It's been ten years since God first promised Abram that he would be a "great nation." While Abram believes he will have his own child as an heir, he's not as certain of Sarai's involvement in that promise, nor is Sarai. They attempt to fulfill God's promise on their own. Then they abandon Hagar and Ishmael. Hagar leaves the story, but God promises her protection in the wilderness and a great name for her son.

Why do they do these things, and what were the consequences?

Why do you think it's important for Abraham and Sarah (and us) to remember this story?

Discuss the following only if time allows:

Have you ever done something rash and destructive? If so, what were the consequences?

Genesis 17 (the new names and the sign of the covenant)

Abram is ninety-nine in this passage. When God renews God's covenant with him, he falls on his face and obeys the command of circumcision. God changes the names of Abram and Sarai to Abraham, meaning "Father of multitudes," and Sarah, that means "Princess".

A new name, or circumcision, can be thought of as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace." What else is like that, either in your faith or in your family life? (Answers might include worship, sacramental practices, changing a name at marriage, or family customs.)

Why do you think it was important for Abraham and Sarah's descendants to remember this story?