

dwell[®]



Imagine . . . Being Part of God’s Family

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We are grateful to Mimi Larson for her work in developing this unit of *Dwell*. We are also grateful to April Hartmann for drawing the illustrations in this unit.

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Dwell

Imagine (Grades K-1)

Year 1, Unit 1: Imagine . . . Being Part of God’s Family

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Welcome to Dwell!

Split-second images, fast-food dinners, instant messages, and intense competitions are part of daily life for the school-age kids who walk through the doors of your church each week. What if children's ministry was different? Not more of the same, but less? What if kids had the opportunity to press "pause" on their fast-paced life so they could "be still and know that I am God"?

Dwell is more than a curriculum—it's a place where kids and leaders pause to wonder . . . imagine . . . marvel . . . and dive into God's story. Developed out of a desire to provide kids with less noise and more time to experience God, *Dwell* creates an environment where kids are offered opportunities to enter God's story, and then live into and live out of it together.

For information on the big things in *Dwell*, including the age-level characteristics of the kids in your group, the scope and sequence at each level, and the curriculum goals and values, visit www.dwellcurriculum.org. Meanwhile, here are some questions and answers you might find helpful when using *Dwell*:

What's in it for me?

You're a leader, but you're also a learner. So we added something just for you to every session. "Reflections" are short devotionals designed to take you deeper into the story with background information, wondering questions, and teaching suggestions. Reading them will help you prepare to teach . . . and grow!

What are "wondering questions"?

Wondering questions invite learners to dwell in God's story as they consider the people in the story, the choices they made, and how God was at work in their lives. They aren't a test—in fact they have no right or wrong answers! Wondering questions let you pause and reflect on God's story longer, allowing it to take root and grow faith. We've provided you with wondering questions for every story. Depending on the ages and attention span of your particular group, you may want to pause and wonder during the storytelling or wait until after the story is finished to ask them—feel free to tailor the session to work with your kids. And be sure to ask what they wonder about too!

How do I tell stories in a way that connects with kids?

Kids know the difference between a story told from the page and one that's told from the heart. The best way for you to prepare is by reading the story out loud several times at home. (Try doing so once a day for the week leading up to your session—you'll be amazed at the results.) When you tell a story we've provided, keep it nearby for a reference but aim to know your story well enough that you can make eye contact with your audience and use your voice and face to express emotion.

Does theology really matter in a children's curriculum?

Just because a children's curriculum contains Bible stories doesn't mean it is designed to teach kids what they need to know. The Re★formed tips you'll find throughout this guide are your *guarantee* that every story is taught from a *Reformed, God-centered perspective*. It's a perspective that views the Bible as a story about God—not about biblical heroes or morals or us—and considers every story as part of the one big story of God's redemption and restoration of this fallen world through Jesus Christ. The Re★formed statements are your assurance that we take what your kids will be learning seriously; they explain our approach in every story you'll be teaching.

What do I need to know about “Faith Modeling”?

It’s important to *tell* kids God’s story, but you’ll make a bigger impact when you *live into* God’s story together. One of the ways to do that is by sharing your faith with the kids in your group. Throughout the leader’s guide you’ll find “Faith Modeling” tips to help you do that.

What do the multiple intelligence icons have to do with how kids learn?

Studies have shown that people learn differently. If *what* we teach is going to impact kids, we need to pay attention to *how* we teach. Each activity in *Dwell* pays attention to the ways kids learn. The icons (see p. 5) are there to let you know which learning styles each activity taps into the most. For more information on learning styles—and a fun quiz you can give your kids to find out how they learn best, visit www.dwellcurriculum.org.

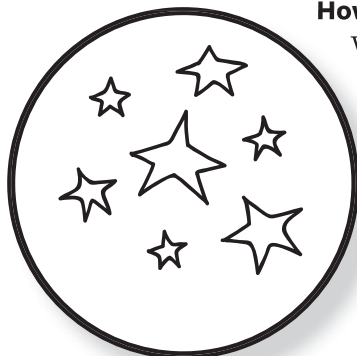
What are “story symbols”?

Each Bible story in *Dwell* has its own story symbol (you’ll find a complete set you can download for free at www.dwellcurriculum.org). By providing kids with a pictorial timeline, these symbols help them see how all God’s stories fit together in one big story. Each symbol is also found in the God’s Big Story cards that families will be using at home, so that the learning that begins at church can continue at home during the week!

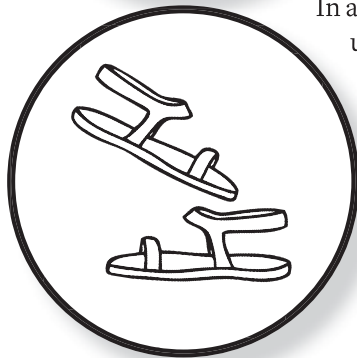
Tip
Rearranging the symbols and having kids re-hang them is a fun way to review the stories you’ve told!

During the sessions you’ll use the story symbols to review where you’ve been in God’s story and to wonder about where you’re going next. Here are some suggestions to display your story symbols: hang up a new one each week to form a border that runs along the wall; attach each new symbol to form a “patchwork quilt” on the wall; or clip symbols to a “clothesline” that runs along one wall.

How does *Dwell* help me partner with parents?



When families open their God’s Big Story set, they’ll find 165 cards that connect directly to every single story taught in the Imagine, Marvel, and Wonder levels of *Dwell*. Each story card in the set features a Bible passage and the symbol that matches the one kids saw when you told that Bible story at church. On the back of each card are six ways a family can respond to that story. Easy and fun to use, the cards encourage kids and adults to talk about their faith and wonder about God’s story together.



In addition to the God’s Big Story cards that families will be using at home, we’ve provided you with a simple way to send families a message about what’s going on in your group. You can either print and distribute a reproducible letter to families or use an online customizable e-message at www.dwellcurriculum.org.

You’ll also want to point parents to www.nurturekidsfaith.org, where they’ll discover practical tips for Christian parents and recommended resources.

A few notes about music . . .

For the Imagine (grades K-1), Wonder (grades 2-3), and Marvel (grades 4-5) levels we've put together two CDs called DwellSongs, one for each year of curriculum. On each DwellSongs CD you'll find songs that connect with the stories taught at each level as well as Scripture songs chosen to help kids remember specific verses and/or phrases of Scripture. We've also made all the songs available for a downloadable purchase at www.dwellcurriculum.org/music. (We think the whole family will enjoy listening to DwellSongs—you can purchase them for your families or direct parents to them at www.faithaliveresources.org.)


You'll find lyrics for the songs for each unit at the back of your leader's guide. The Scripture song lyrics can also be found in the Bible! (While the translations used in the recordings may differ or may use particular phrases from the Scripture passage rather than the entire verse, we're confident that all the Scripture song recordings offer you and your children a wonderful way to hide Scripture in your hearts!)


Dive! (middle school) kids are an eclectic bunch—they have a wide-ranging (and ever-changing) taste in music, and their willingness to sing and dance may vary. Where possible we've provided you with suggestions for songs at this level. Invite your kids to bring in their favorite God-glorifying music to enjoy together!


Tailoring Your Sessions to the Ways Children Learn


How do children learn? The answer to that question can be almost as varied as the children in your group. Some learn best through words. Others through music. Still others through nature or through movement.


Sessions in *Dwell* curriculum try to respect the many ways children learn. Dwell sessions include a wide range of activities that speak to children with the following types of intelligence (based on Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences). Within each session, the icons below highlight the learning styles represented by each activity. As you teach, you'll begin to get a sense for how the children in your group learn best. Children who are


 **Word Smart**
learn best through verbal activities (listening, reading, or speaking), including discussions, worksheets, writing, reading, storytelling, and word games.


 **Number Smart**
learn best by exploring patterns and relationships through activities such as problem solving, logic puzzles or games, making charts and graphs, or putting things in sequence.


 **Picture Smart**
learn best by visualizing concepts. These kids enjoy viewing maps, slides, pictures, videos, and diagrams; making jigsaw puzzles; and expressing their ideas with shape, color, and design.

 **Body Smart**
learn best by using their bodies, acting things out, using puppets, moving— anything hands-on.

 **Music Smart**
learn best through sound, music, and rhythm—playing musical instruments, writing their own songs and raps, listening to recordings, singing, and so on.

 **People Smart**
learn best through doing things with others, cooperating and working in small or large groups, role playing, conversations, brainstorming, and other interactive exercises.

 **Self Smart**
learn best by working independently through such things as writing in a journal, meditating, reading, and reflecting.

 **Earth Smart**
learn best through activities connected to living things and natural phenomena, through nature walks, examining plants and animals, nature experiments, and activities that focus on ecology.

—The ideas on this page are based on material from the following resources: *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom* by Thomas Armstrong, © 2000, and a chart prepared by Donald L. Griggs, Livermore, California.

1

Abraham and Sarah

Scripture

Genesis 12 and selected verses from Genesis 13

Focus

Abraham and Sarah belonged to God; we belong to God too.

Faith Nurture Goals

- Imagine Abraham and Sarah’s long trip to a strange land.
- Realize and feel secure that, like Abraham and Sarah, we also belong to God.
- Give praise and thanks for belonging to God.
- Share the joy of belonging to God with others.

Memory Challenge

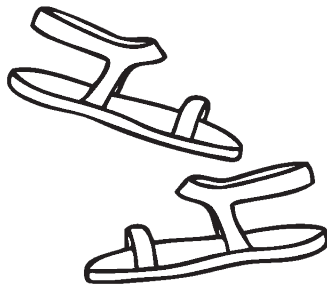
Psalm 100:1-3

Reflection: Getting into the Story

Most people who know anything about the Heidelberg Catechism know these poignant words at the very beginning: “My only comfort in life and death is that I belong . . . to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.” That comfort of belonging is the theme for this unit.

But the road to ultimate comfort in Jesus Christ began long before the events of the manger, the cross, and the empty tomb. It began even before this story of Abraham and Sarah. It began in the loving heart of the Creator God who made this world and all its creatures with us human beings as its crowning glory.

Even after we defaced God’s good creation with our sinful rebellion, God did not let us go. God determined to redeem his world and restore us as his magnificent, image-bearing children. But with today’s episode, the story of God’s redeeming love takes a whole new direction. Beginning with just two people, and then a family, a tribe, a nation, and one very special person, his Son, Jesus Christ, God begins the long, long journey of reclaiming a world and a people that belongs to him.



To get into this story, it helps to begin with chapter 11 where the author sets the scene. It’s like Google Earth, as the “camera” swoops in from far away in Ur with a list of names, and zeros in closer and closer till the whole screen is filled with just two people, Abram and Sarai.

As we look at their faces, we see lines of sadness. These two relatively old people have no children, an especially tragic circumstance in that day. What we’re really seeing here is a dead end. From Adam and Eve slinking out of the garden, to the tragicomic bewilderment of Babel, here is what human effort has come to—barrenness.

Right there, in the bitter reality of human helplessness, God enters the scene. A call? A voice? Who knows what the experience was really like, but Abram heard its compelling invitation, “Go!” Amazingly, Abram and Sarai follow that stunning invitation to a new land, leaving everything behind. But it’s more than a command or even an invitation. It’s a promise: “I will bless you . . . and all peoples of the earth will be blessed through you.”

God is on the move! And here’s the wonderful thing: God determines to use the very creatures that rebelled to be his partners in blessing (redeeming) the world he made.

Belonging to God doesn't just mean that God finally does something to redeem us from sin and death. It means that we human beings will be his covenant partners in bringing it about. Belonging involves God's claim and God's call; his purpose includes our partnership.

Wondering

In *Dwell* we ask children to do what's natural to them—to wonder about things. In order to do that, we as leaders need to reawaken a sense of wonder in our own hearts, a childlike openness that will enable us to see and experience new things in an old, old story.

- What about their dead-end lives might have made Abram and Sarai open to God's call, and why?
- How did Abram and Sarai experience God's call? How do you?
- What do you think they felt like on the day of departure from Haran?
- What did the blessing mean to Abram and Sarai, and what does it mean to you?

Teaching

- Remember that young children have little sense of time and history, so they won't understand much of what makes you excited about God's grand purposes. For them it's the concrete, here and now reality of God's call, of leaving home and traveling far away that will stir their imagination and faith.
- Belonging to God means carrying God's blessing in your heart. The idea of blessing may be foreign to the children, but everyone craves the experience of being blessed. As you sense the blessing of belonging to God, think of ways to convey it to the children—a word, a gesture that conveys the wonder of God's love and belonging, and the specialness of God's call.
- If this story has connected with an experience of your own faith journey that's appropriate for young children, prepare to tell it simply and from the heart.
- Abram and Sarai receive new names later on; in this session we use the names Abraham and Sarah to avoid confusion.

General Supplies

Each session of *Dwell* includes specific materials you'll need for teaching it, such as printable pages or props to use for telling the story. In addition, you'll want to keep a stash of the usual teaching supplies: Bibles, scissors, markers, crayons, board or newsprint, and the like, including a CD player or MP3 player.

Session at a Glance

Steps	Time	Activities	Session-Specific Materials	Multiple Intelligences
Gathering for God's Story	10	Nametags Praise and prayer	<input type="checkbox"/> Suitcase-shaped nametags (printable page 55), one per child <input type="checkbox"/> Yarn cut in 18" (45 cm) lengths <input type="checkbox"/> Hole puncher <input type="checkbox"/> Stickers <input type="checkbox"/> Song: "God Is Always with Us"	Aa
Entering the Story	5-10	Story	<input type="checkbox"/> Suitcase packed with a Bible, clothes, dishes, blankets, towel, cups, bowl, and a pair of sandals	Aa
Living into the Story	15	Story drama	<input type="checkbox"/> Blankets/sheets <input type="checkbox"/> Clothing props: towels/scarves/neckties/vests <input type="checkbox"/> Stuffed animals, optional	Aa
Living Out of the Story	10	Belonging pictures	<input type="checkbox"/> Story symbol, session 1 (printable page 52) <input type="checkbox"/> Show and Share papers, session 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Dear Family letters (printable page 49 or email version from www.dwellcurriculum.org), one per child	

Step 1 Gathering for God's Story

Note: Print and prepare suitcase-shaped nametags (using cardstock if available) before class begins.

Tip

Play music as kids enter and as they work on projects. It sets a positive tone, and kids learn the songs just by hearing them!

Today is a big day for you and the children in your group—they're arriving with anticipation about what will happen and you're arriving prepared to share and experience the wonder of God's love with your group. That's exciting! As you prepare for your time together, be sure to read the Bible story (p. 9) out loud several times so you'll be able to maintain eye contact with your group while telling it.

Get off to a good start by warmly welcoming each child, smiling as you look into their eyes, and learning their names as soon as possible. Fill in the children's names on their nametags as they arrive and, as time allows, invite kids to personalize their nametag by decorating it with markers or crayons and stickers. Remember to tell kids your name and make yourself a nametag too!



Tip

You may have children in your group who have no concept of who God is. Explain that God made our beautiful world and that God made each one of them. Promise that they'll hear more about God's love every time this group meets together. Bible storybooks from the *God Loves Me* series are a wonderful way to introduce God's story to young children. They're available at www.faithaliveresources.org.

Gather your group around you. Explain that you are happy about two things today: that each of them has come to spend time with God, and that each of them belongs to God in a special way. To reinforce your comments and to help everyone learn names quickly, name each child as you say, "[Name] belongs to God."

Point out that there is someone else in your small group—someone who will be there every time they are together. Can they guess who that is? Tell your kids that God is always with us and that means God is with you right now! Invite kids to stand and get ready to praise God as you sing a song about that together. Play "God Is Always with Us" and encourage your kids to move as described in the song—getting down low, jumping up high, shouting, turning around, spinning, and waving their hands. Be sure you join in on the fun too!

As the song ends, praise God with a round of applause together. Then invite kids to join you in taking a deep breath in . . . and out . . . to slow down your heart rates before you sit down and come to God in prayer together. During your prayer, mention how wonderful it is to know that God knows and loves each person in your group, and thank God for always being with each person in your group every day—at home, at school, at church and everywhere else they go.

Step 2 Entering the Story

Show your group the suitcase you've brought. Take a few moments to talk together about suitcases and what they're used for. Invite kids to guess what might be in your suitcase today. Open it so that your kids are able to see all the belongings—blankets, sandals, dishes, clothes—you've packed inside. Remove your Bible and close the suitcase, but don't fasten it shut—you'll want to do that later as you tell the story.

Tip

For each week of this unit you'll be using a suitcase (a backpack would work well too) to hold your story props. If you team teach with another leader, you might want to share a story suitcase.

As you open your Bible to Genesis 12, explain to the children that you've brought it because it contains a story from God that you'd like to tell them—a story from God about a big move. Leave your open Bible on your lap or in front of you as you tell the story.

The story follows:

A long, long time ago—before there were cars or bikes, brick houses or apartment buildings—there lived an old man and an old woman. Their names were Abraham and Sarah, and they lived in a village of tents with their helpers, their helper’s children, and all their animals.

One day God came to tell Abraham two really important things.

The first thing God told Abraham was, “I want you to move far, far away. Leave your country, leave your land, leave your relatives, and go to the land that I will show you.”

How do you think Abraham felt when God told him to move far, far away to a place he’d never been before? *(Pause for kids to share responses.)*

If Abraham was feeling worried or scared about moving, he probably felt better when God told him the second important thing.

God said, “Abraham, you and Sarah belong to me. I’ve chosen you to be my people and I’m going to bless you and your family in wonderful ways. You’re going to have a big family—too many people to count—more than the stars in the night sky! People all over the world will know who you are and I’ll use you to help the whole world know that I am God.”

Wow! God promised to give Abraham many things and make him famous and use him to tell others about God!

I wonder how Abraham felt hearing that news. *(Pause for responses.)*

Abraham did what God asked him to do. *(Pretend to organize the things in your suitcase and then fasten it shut as you describe how Abraham and Sarah prepared to leave.)* He and his wife, Sarah, and all of their helpers folded their tents, rolled up their blankets, gathered their animals, packed their clothes, stacked their dishes, and got ready to move.

What would you make sure to pack if you were moving far, far away? *(Pause for responses.)*

Once all their things were packed and everyone was ready to go, Abraham and Sarah began the long trip to the place that God would show them. There were many hot and dusty days, but they knew they belonged to God and they trusted God to take care of them.

Do you know that you belong to God and that God loves you very much—as much as Abraham and Sarah? It’s true!

Finally, the tired travelers arrived in the new land God had chosen for them. God came to show Abraham around. *(Look left, right, behind, and in front as you describe God showing Abraham the new land.)* “Abraham,” God said, “Look both ways. Turn and look behind you. Now look waaaay out in front of you. I’m giving you everything your eye can see. It’s for you and your family forever! And that family is going to be BIG! I’m going to bless you with more children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-and-greater grandchildren than you can even count!

Abraham did look around. He thought about what God had said and about how wonderful it was to belong to God. Then he gathered some rocks, piled them up on top of each other to make a special altar, and praised God.

Everything happened just as God promised. God blessed Abraham, Abraham became famous, and the whole world was blessed through Abraham. Why? Because many, many, many years after God chose Abraham and Sarah to belong to him, a special child—Jesus, God’s own Son—was born in the huge family of people that came from them.

Tip

Remember that wondering questions have no right or wrong answers! They are simply a way to help kids “dwell” in the story as they use their imaginations to consider the story on a deeper level. Don’t force kids to answer. Do allow time for them to quietly consider. Show that you appreciate their contributions and insights.

Re★formed

Although it would be easy to teach this story as an example of how we should trust God, it's much more than that. As Reformed Christians we believe this story is more about God's call than it is about Abraham's answer.

But before that could happen, Abraham and Sarah needed to have a child of their own—and I'll tell you all about that next time!

Step 3 Living into the Story

Invite your kids to imagine that all of you joined Abraham and Sarah on their big move as you tell the story again together. Show kids the props you've brought. Suggest ideas for how you might arrange the room to tell the story (see below) but run with the ideas your group comes up with as much as possible so they can really experience the story at their level.

Here are some ideas to explore with your kids as they set up the space:

- How could you spread out or arrange the sheets/blankets to create mountains and land? Should you cover up and include the room furniture in some way? Place a sheet on the floor for the hot, dusty desert trail that they traveled?
- Where might the starting place—Abraham and Sarah's tent village—be? Where should you put the ending place—the new land?
- Invite kids to open up and empty the suitcase near the starting place—they'll be packing it again during the story.
- Where should the stuffed animals go (if you brought some)? Who would like to be in charge of moving them?
- Which prop would you like to wear? Who could be Abraham? Sarah? Who are the helpers and the helper's children?
- Is there anything in the room you could use to build an altar at the end of the story? (Books, perhaps?) Where do you think Abraham found the rocks he used for his altar—should you scatter around your altar pieces in the new land?

Once everyone is ready, it's time to retell the story together. Invite everyone to pretend to “work” in their tent village as you retell the story, using the story from Step 2 as a guide. As you tell the story, help kids along as needed. Say,

Show how you imagine Abraham's face might have looked when he heard God's news. *(Pause for responses.)*

I wonder how the faces of Sarah and the helpers looked when Abraham told them what God had said. *(Pause for responses.)*

How do you think everyone felt when they had to say goodbye to their old places and friends and family before moving far away? *(Pause for responses.)*

Then walk along with them around the room for the long, tiring journey. Have Abraham show everyone the new land that God showed him by telling everyone to look left . . . then right . . . behind . . . and waaaaay out in front. Then have Abraham build an altar out of the “rocks.”

Tip

Praise God with a popcorn prayer. Explain that you'll begin and end the prayer and in the middle part, when you're quiet, kids can just jump in and thank God for their blessings—like clothes, their family, or whatever else is on their mind!

At the end of the story, invite your group to kneel around the altar and join you in a prayer:

Dear God, Abraham and Sarah and their helpers must have been so excited about all the ways you blessed them. We're excited too because we know that we belong to you too, just like they did! Thank you for loving us and blessing us, Lord. Amen.

Invite kids to remove their props and help you set aside the storytelling materials. Point out that even though they are done acting out the story about Abraham, they are still in God's story—because God is working in

their lives every day!

Step 4 Living Out of the Story

Note: Hang up the story symbol for this session before class begins. For ideas on how to display the story symbols in your room, see page 3.

Move to a table or to an area on the floor where everyone can do some drawing. Hold up today's Show and Share paper. Explain that each person will get one today and a new one each week—their job is to show and share the story with someone else.

Tell your group that the suitcase on the paper reminds you of the today's story. Ask if anyone can see something else in your room that's also a reminder of the story. When a child points to the sandals story symbol hanging on your wall, explain that every week as you hear a different story about God, you'll be adding another story symbol to the wall to remind them of that story. Wonder out loud how many story symbols you'll have by the end of your year together!

Hand everyone a Show and Share paper. Read the names Abraham and Sarah and remind your group that they belong to God just like Abraham and Sarah. Invite kids to print their name on the "_____ Belongs to God" suitcase tag. Point out the story on the back of the Show and Share paper and invite them to share the story with someone else at home.

Open the "suitcases" and name some special belongings that Abraham and Sarah might have brought along on their moving adventure with God. Ask kids to name

some special things they like to bring with them when you go places—pjs, a favorite stuffed animal or toy? Encourage them to draw a picture of one special thing they named in their suitcases. As children work, go around the room and talk to them about their drawings, reminding them that they are God's special belongings!



Before kids leave, gather them around you and show them where Psalm 100 is found in your Bible. Say verses 1-3 for them and invite them to repeat the verses with you—joyfully! Explain that over the next few weeks they'll be learning those words together. Next week they'll learn a song with those words in it. Give each child a copy of the Memory Challenge (printable page 50 or 51) and invite everyone to be very quiet for a moment as they think of a good place to put their page when they get home so they'll be able to look at it every day. Invite them to decorate it before putting it in that special place too!

Whisper a closing thought to each child as they head out the door: You belong to God!

Faith Modeling

Be sure to show and express with your group the joy that belonging to God gives to you! Look for an opportunity to tell your group about a time when you had to move or were uncertain about a new beginning and how you experienced God's faithfulness in that situation.

Tip

Try saying "Tell me about your picture" instead of asking "What's that?" when talking to kids about their work. It encourages conversation and respects kids' drawing ability.

Tip

Connect with families this week with a letter (printable page 49) or email (www.dwellcurriculum.org) about this unit.

Easy Extras

1. Arrival Activity: Footprints

Time: 10-15 minutes

Materials: paper, crayons or pencils, scissors

Your kids will be going on a long journey today! Make footprints together while you're waiting for everyone to arrive. Use crayons or pencils to trace around your feet onto a piece of paper. Cut out the shapes—offer to assist kids who need help cutting. Save them for your story drama (step 3) and scatter them on the floor to help map out Abraham's trip!

2. Trail Mix

Time: 5 minutes

Materials: baggies or containers with snacks (see below)

Enjoy a travelers' snack together as you get to know each other better. Before class, prepare a small plastic baggie or container for each child with munchable items like Cheerios, chocolate chips, marshmallows, raisins, Goldfish crackers, and the like. Avoid nut products in case of allergies. Then hand out the snacks to enjoy as you talk about your favorite outdoor places to go.

3. Make a Mural

This activity can be substituted for Step 3: Living into the Story.

Time: 10-15 minutes

Materials: large sheets of paper or mural paper prepared as described, precut paper shapes for kids to draw on, pencils or crayons, poster putty, glue

Imagine Abraham and Sarah's moving adventure with God as you create a large mural together using mural paper or several sheets of paper attached together. Before class, draw a long, long road across the mural paper. Add some hills and mountains, but don't color anything in. Hang the mural at eye level on the wall and walk your hand along it as you tell the Bible story the first time through. Then spend a few moments imagining the sights, sounds, and smells of the story events together and invite kids to help recreate the story with you. Give each child a precut paper shape (an oval or circle works well) on which to draw a person. Note: Drawing abilities vary widely with kids this age, so expect some very simple dashes, dots, and stick people from younger kids. While they work, prepare some paper "rocks" for the altar, adding wall putty to the back and setting them near the new land on the mural. As you retell the story, kids can move their people along the road, attaching them at the end and taking turns adding a "rock" to the altar.

Afterwards, invite kids to glue their people on the mural. Then hang your mural outside your room; encourage kids to show and tell about it!

4. Travel Game **Aa**

Time: 5 minutes

Materials: none needed

Gather your group around you and invite kids to imagine that they are going on a long trip to a faraway place. Ask kids for destination ideas and select a location to use for your game. Encourage everyone to think of one thing they'd want to bring on the trip for sure. Explain that you'll start the game by saying, "For our trip to [name of place], I'm going to pack sunglasses. The next person should say the same thing that you said and then add their own item. For example, "For our trip to [place], I'm going to pack sunglasses and a snack." Continue around the circle, with each child repeating the entire list and adding a new item.

2

The Birth of Isaac

Scripture

Genesis 18:1-15; 21:1-7

Focus

God can do anything. God promised to give Abraham and Sarah a son, and God did. We can trust God's promises to us too.

Faith Nurture Goals

- Imagine how Abraham and Sarah felt when God's promise of a child came true.
- Realize and feel secure that, like Abraham and Sarah, we belong to God and can trust his promise to love us.
- Give praise and thanks for God's love and promise-keeping.
- Share the promise of God's constant love with others.

Memory Fun

Psalm 100:1-3

Reflection: Getting into the Story

The promise made to Abraham and Sarah in the last episode clearly includes the promise of a child, an heir. Yet, as Sarah describes it, "I am worn out and my lord is old." They've tried, over the years, having a child through Hagar, the slave, and designating the servant Eliezer as heir. But nothing works out, and God persists in his promise of a son.

Three mysterious visitors show up at Abraham and Sarah's tent one day. Who are they? The text tells us that it is the LORD who has come for a visit. (Note that in the Old Testament when LORD is in all caps, it refers to the holy covenant name of God, Yahweh.) Is this a person or an angel? Three or one? It's all very mysterious, but the inspired writer does not tell us more.

Interestingly, this scene, depicted in icons, became a source for prayerful meditation in the Eastern Orthodox churches. In the Orthodox tradition, icons are more than pictures; they're windows to look through to find spiritual truth. One famous and beautiful icon by Rublev called "The Holy Trinity" pictures this very scene. Check it out on the web.

Abraham hurries out of his tent to serve the strange visitors without ever asking who they are. While his elaborate hospitality is common in that part of the world, there seems to be some kind of recognition that these visitors are very special.

After dinner is served, they get to the point. "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Nothing is said about Abraham's reaction; our eyes immediately turn to Sarah, lingering at the door of the tent. And that's the focus of the visitor's attention as well, since they first ask about her whereabouts.

What does Sarah do? She laughs to herself: "Yeah, sure, I haven't seen Abe in my bed for some time, and there's to be a baby bouncing on my sagging knees?" Of course, she denies the derisive laughter, but the point is made. "Yes, you did laugh."

All this reminds us that this story fits a biblical pattern. In the Bible, when God is going to do something new, it often begins in childlessness or barrenness—a symbol of human helplessness. Think of Rachel; of Samson's parents; of Samuel's mother, Hannah; of John the Baptist's mother, Elizabeth; and, of course, of Mary, the mother of the Lord. She's not barren,



but a virgin. After announcing her miraculous pregnancy, the visiting angel says to her, in words closely echoing the visitors' words to Abraham and Sarah, "nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37, NIV 1984).

As we read so often in the psalms, we find ourselves "waiting for the Lord." This story and so many others teach us that God always fulfills his promises, but not necessarily in the timeframe we think reasonable. God is the God of the impossible possibilities. Isaac (which means *laughter*) will indeed be born soon; God will have the last laugh.

Wondering

- What does it mean that "the LORD appeared to Abraham that day"?
- Why is there so much focus on Sarah in this story?
- What do you think was the nature of her laugh—surprise? Derision? Delight?
- What are the promises of God on which you are waiting today? What doubts do you entertain about their fulfillment?

Teaching

- Kids can easily connect with the idea of promises made and promises fulfilled, and they're keenly aware of any failure to fulfill promises. They also know that sometimes waiting is involved. You can dramatize the intense waiting in this story and the doubts and questions it raises.
- Above all, make sure the children come away with a strong understanding that God is a promise-keeping God who can handle all our doubts and fears.

General Supplies

Each session of *Dwell* includes specific materials you'll need for teaching it, such as printable pages or props to use for telling the story. In addition, you'll want to keep a stash of the usual teaching supplies: Bibles, scissors, markers, crayons, board or newsprint, and the like, including a CD player or MP3 player.

Session at a Glance

Steps	Time	Activities	Session-Specific Materials	Multiple Intelligences
Gathering for God's Story	15	Welcome Praise and prayer	<input type="checkbox"/> Stars (printable page 56), one star per child <input type="checkbox"/> Yarn or string <input type="checkbox"/> Paper clips <input type="checkbox"/> Masking tape <input type="checkbox"/> Songs: "God Is Always with Us" and "Shout"	
Entering the Story	10	Story	<input type="checkbox"/> Story suitcase from session 1 packed with a blanket, sandals from last week, box or bag of treats, and Bible	Aa
Living into the Story	15	Story drama	<input type="checkbox"/> Blankets, sheets, dishes, baby doll <input type="checkbox"/> Wearable props: towels/scarves/neckties	Aa
Living Out of the Story	5-8	Story symbol I Belong and story song	<input type="checkbox"/> Story symbol from last time <input type="checkbox"/> Story symbol, session 2 (printable page 52) <input type="checkbox"/> Poster putty or masking tape <input type="checkbox"/> Show and share papers, session 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Paper napkins/tea towels/scarves, optional	

Tip

Instead of hanging the stars from the ceiling, you could create a classroom mural. Write “We Belong to God” on dark blue/black poster board and invite kids to glue on their stars as they enter. (If you have time, kids could decorate their stars with markers first.) Fill in the spaces between the stars with lots of small gummed stars and hang the result on your wall near your storytelling area.

Step 1 Gathering for God’s Story

Note: Before class begins, prepare a star for each child—print, cut apart, and add the child’s name to each. Attach a paper clip tied with string to each star and hang them from the ceiling with masking tape (or to your wall if it’s not possible to use the ceiling).

Today the journey continues as you explore God’s love and promise-keeping. Greet each child by name as you express your joy at seeing them again. Remind the children of your name too! Encourage kids to find their dangling star as they enter the room—tell them it’s a clue about the part of God’s story you’ll be learning today.

As you did last week, share how happy you are that they’ve come to spend time with God and explore one of God’s stories from the Bible. Take a few moments to give each child the opportunity to share any news they have. (Kids this age usually have something happening in their life that they are eager to tell about!) After everyone has shared, point out how great it is to know that God was with each one of them in all the places they were since the group was last together. Invite kids to stand up and sing and move their bodies in praise as you sing the song you learned last week—“God Is Always with Us.”

Sit back down on the floor together and remind your group that before they left last time, you shared some Bible verses that you’re all going to be learning together. Read Psalm 100:1-3 from your Bible and invite kids to repeat them after you. Play “Shout” and point out that the words of the song are the words you just read from the Bible together. Sing along, adding simple actions to help you learn the words together.

Close this time of worship by joining hands in prayer, thanking God for bringing you all together again and for always loving you.

Tip

An online image search for “outer space stars” will pull up many different images of the universe (and will appeal to your Earth Smart kids!). Print a few and bring them in for children to look at. Invite kids to try to count how many stars are in the picture.

Step 2 Entering the Story

Note: In the days leading up to this session, be sure to read the story out loud several times at home. Think about words you’ll want to emphasize and places you’ll want to pause. Then tell it with expression and from your heart!

Prepare to enter God’s story together by talking about promises. Tell the children that today’s story is about a promise, a very special promise that God made to Abraham and Sarah.

Invite your group to tell you about a promise someone has made to them—maybe a promise about something they’re looking forward to. Share a story about a promise from your life too. Wonder together about God’s promises. Does God ever break promises? Does God make promises to us?

To reinforce your comments and to help everyone learn names quickly, include each child as you say: “God has a promise for [name].”

Show the children the suitcase you brought. Take a few moments to remember what was in the suitcase last week. Invite kids to guess what might be in your suitcase today. Open the suitcase so that the children are able to see what’s inside: your Bible, a bag or box of treats (raisins, crackers, fruit, popcorn, or cookies), a small blanket or piece of cloth, and sandals from last week. Peer into your suitcase and take out the bag of treats, setting it next to you as you *promise* (put emphasis on that word) kids a special treat at the end of the story. Take out

the sandals and ask the children if they remember last week’s story. Remind them that the story was about belonging: God chose Abraham and Sarah, and they belonged to God.

Remove your Bible and close the suitcase. As you open your Bible to Genesis 18, remind the children that this part of God’s story is from God’s Word, the Bible. Explain that you want to tell them a story about God and a promise God kept. Leave your Bible open on your lap or in front of you as you tell the story.

Tip
Be sure there aren’t any food allergies in your group before serving any treats.

The story follows:

Abraham and Sarah traveled far to live in the new land that God had given them. At night, in this new home, they would spread out their blankets to sleep on. (*Remove the small blanket from your suitcase and spread it out in front of you.*)

As Abraham and Sarah lay in their tents they would look out at the sky and see the many, many stars (*look up and point to all the stars in the sky*) and be reminded of the promise God had made to them. Abraham remembered God’s words: “I have chosen you to belong to me, and I will bless you and your family in wonderful ways. You’re going to have a big family—so many that no one will be able to count them, just like the stars in the night sky. And because you and your family belong to me, I’ll use you to help the whole world know that I am a great God.”

What a wonderful promise! But Abraham and Sarah wondered if it would ever come true. They were getting old and still had no children. They had been waiting a long time, a very long time, for a precious baby from God.

I wonder if you’ve ever had to wait a very, very long time for something special. (*Pause for kids to share responses.*)

How do you think Abraham and Sarah felt when they were still waiting for God’s promise to come true? (*Pause for responses.*)

Day after day, Abraham and Sarah waited for a baby. (*Fold up your blanket.*) They kept getting older and older. They wondered if God would keep the promise.

One day three visitors from heaven came to Abraham’s tent. One of these visitors was God. As Abraham hurried out to greet them, he invited the visitors to stay and rest for a while. When they said yes, Abraham stuck his head inside the tent and asked Sarah to make them a meal. (*Spread out the blanket again and pretend to put dishes and food on it.*)

As the visitors were eating, God spoke to Abraham and reminded him of the special promise God had given to Abraham and Sarah—the promise of children. “Next year,” God said, “Sarah will have a son.”

(*Hold blanket up and peek around it.*) Inside the tent, Sarah heard God’s promise that next year she would have a son, and she laughed. After years and years of waiting, Sarah wondered if God’s promise would ever come true. She thought she was too old to have a baby.

I wonder if God will keep his promise to Sarah. (*Pause for responses.*)

I wonder if anything is impossible for God. (*Pause for responses.*)

Sarah had forgotten one very important thing—God always keeps promises. God kept the promise to Abraham and Sarah, and the next year Sarah gave birth to a baby boy. (*Fold blanket around right hand and pretend to rock baby on left arm.*)

Re★formed
The focus of this story is not Sarah’s reaction but the faithfulness of our promise-keeping God.

How do you think Abraham and Sarah felt when the baby was born? (*Pause for responses.*)

I wonder what they said to God. (*Pause for responses.*)

Abraham and Sarah named their son Isaac, which means “laughter.” When Abraham and Sarah saw Isaac, they remembered that God’s promise had come true, and they laughed for joy!

Step 3 Living into the Story

Invite everyone to imagine that you are living with Abraham and Sarah in their tent as you retell the story together. Show kids the props you brought along, and ask kids to suggest ideas for how you might arrange the room to tell the story (see some ideas below). As much as possible, use the ideas your group comes up with so they can really experience the story at their level. You can use the following prompts to help kids suggest ways to transform their space into the story setting.

- How could we spread out or arrange the sheets/blankets to create a tent? Should we cover up or include the room furniture in some way?
- Which part of the room should the visitors arrive from?
- Where could we pretend there was a shady tree for the guests to sit under?

Assign roles and pass out clothing props. You’ll need an Abraham, Sarah, visitors, and several servants to help prepare the meal. You might want to have the visitors stand at their arrival location until it’s time for them to arrive. Sarah and the servants might be busy doing chores like cleaning dishes or sweeping the floor; Abraham and a servant might be building a campfire outside.

Once everyone is ready, it’s time to tell the story together. Invite kids to pretend they’re doing things around the tent village as you retell the story, using the story from step 2 as a guide. Help kids along, if necessary, using prompts like these:

- Wonder aloud what Abraham and Sarah wished for when they looked up into the night sky.
- Wonder aloud how Abraham felt when he saw the visitors approach.
- Pause so everyone can welcome the visitors and prepare them a meal.
- Walk to the door in Sarah’s tent and listen to God’s conversation with Abraham. How would Sarah’s face look when she heard God promise Abraham that she would have a baby by next year?
- Wonder aloud how Sarah and Abraham responded when baby Isaac was born.
- Have Sarah show baby Isaac to everyone.

At the end of the story, invite the children to gather around Sarah and baby Isaac. Tell them that God makes a promise to us, just as he did with Abraham and Sarah. God promises to always love us. As you pray together, encourage kids to pray with you. Children understand that prayer is talking to God, and that God hears them when they pray. Begin your prayer time by inviting children to silently talk to God, sharing their feelings with him and asking a question or making a request. Conclude with the following prayer:

Dear God, just like you promised Abraham and Sarah, you promise to always love us. We are filled with joy, just like Sarah, because we belong to you and know that you keep your promises. Thank you for loving us so much. Amen.

Faith Modeling

Think of an appropriate personal experience you can share about a time when you held on to God’s promise to always love and care for you.

Invite kids to remove their props and help you set aside the storytelling materials. Point out that even though they are done acting the story out about Abraham, Sarah, and baby Isaac, they are still in God’s story. God keeps promises to those who belong to him—people like Abraham and Sarah and people like us! Wonder aloud whether anyone thought you might forget your promise of a treat! Let the children peek into the suitcase and help themselves to a snack.

Step 4 Living Out the Story

Move to a table or to an area on the floor where everyone can do some drawing. Ask if anyone remembers last week's story symbol. When a child points to the sandals story symbol hanging on your wall, ask how the sandals remind them of last week's story. Hold up this week's story symbol and wonder aloud what the stars might remind us of. Invite someone to hang that symbol on your wall beside the one from last week.

Hand out a Show and Share paper to each child. Remind kids that each week they get a new Show and Share paper about that day's Bible story. Their job is to show and share the story with someone else. Read the title of this week's story, "The Birth of Isaac," from their papers. Wonder aloud how the birth of Isaac reminds us of God's promises. (They always come true!)

Remind the children that just as God promised to love Abraham and Sarah, God promises to love them. Invite kids to print their name on the "God will always love _____" star. (Be sure to help children who are not able to print their names.)

Open your papers and recall God's promise to Abraham and Sarah: they would have as many children and grandchildren as the stars in the sky, and the whole world would be blessed through them. Point out that God's promise came true in an incredible way—Jesus came from that great family of people, and because of Jesus, we belong to God's family too. We're part of God's story. Invite kids to add their face to the blank star.

Flip to the back of the paper and show your group that today's story is written as a song. Try it together! (If you have napkins or tea towels or scarves, give one to each child before you begin.) When you're finished, invite everyone to pause for a moment and quietly think of the name of a person they could sing the story song with—a person they could also remind of God's love.

Challenge your kids to try and count all the stars inside their Show and Share papers as they are traveling home today (or do it together in class if you have time) and encourage them to tell someone else about God's promises the next time they see a star in the night sky!

Whisper a closing thought to each child as they leave: God loves you!

Tip

Provide children with strips of fabric they can keep and use again to sing the story song at home: check a thrift shop for scarves or flannel baby blankets.

Easy Extras

1. Arrival Activity: Baby Visit

Time: 5-10 minutes

Materials: parent(s) with new baby

Invite a parent or parents of a new baby to visit your classroom with their little one. As children arrive, encourage them to gather around for a closer look. Ask your guest(s) to tell kids a little bit about the baby to describe their feelings about this precious gift from God.

2. Make a Tent

This activity could be used as an arrival activity or as part of the retelling preparation in Step 3.

Time: 10 minutes

Materials: crayons, markers, or paint; bedsheet or mural paper

Using crayons, markers, or paint, have children decorate a bedsheet or long length of mural paper that can be hung as Abraham's tent. You can use this for telling today's story and as a gathering location in weeks to come.

3. Promise Ball

Time: 5 minutes

Materials: soft ball or beanbag

To continue remembering each other's names, gather kids into a circle. Explain that we are remembering God's promises. You are going to look at a person, say her name, and remind her she is loved by God. Demonstrate by choosing a child. Say: "[Name] is loved by God" and toss the ball to her. When she receives the ball, she should repeat your steps by choosing another child, saying that child's name and reminding him he is loved by God. Continue until every child has had a chance to participate.

4. How Long Must You Wait?

Time: 5 minutes

Materials: roll of toilet paper

Take out a roll of toilet paper and pass it to each child as you ask how old they are, instructing them to rip off the number of sheets that matches their age. After each child has ripped off the correct number of sheets, wonder together how old Abraham was when God answered his prayer. When each child has given an answer, have one person stand at one end of the room and help you unroll one hundred sheets of toilet paper. As you walk across the length of the room, unrolling toilet paper, explain that sometimes God keeps his promises and answers them right away, but sometimes we have to wait. Abraham was one hundred years old when God answered his promise to Abraham and Sarah, and their son, Isaac, was born.

Song Texts

God Is Always with Us

Everybody get down low.
You can go even lower.
Everybody jump up high.
I know you can jump even higher.
C'mon, let's shout as loud as we can shout!
God is here right now.
Yes, he's here, without a doubt.

He is always with us
Through every up and down.
He will never leave us.
He'll always be around.
He's the one, the one we can trust.

God will always be with us.
God will always be with us.

Everybody spin around.
I dare you to spin much faster.
Everybody wave our hands.
See who can wave the fastest.
C'mon, let's shout as loud as we can shout.
God is here right now.
Yes, he's here, without a doubt.

Yeah, he is always with us
Through every up and down.
He will never leave us.
He'll always be around.
He's the one, the one that we can trust.
God will always be with us.
Yeah, yeah, yeah!

He is always with us
Through every up and down
He will never leave us.
He'll always be around.
He's the one, the one that we can trust.
God will always be with us.
God will always be with us.
God will always be with us.

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Shout (Psalm 100:1-3)

Chorus 1:

Li-de-di-le-li-de-li-li-li

Li-de-di-le-li-de-li-li-li

Li-de-di-le-li-de-li-li-li

Li-de-di-le-li-de-li-li-li

Chorus 2:

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth

Worship the Lord with gladness

Come before him with joyful songs

Know that the Lord is God.

Verse:

It is he who made us, and we are his

We are his people, the sheep of his pasture

It is he who made us, and we are his

We are his people, the sheep of his pasture

Repeat Chorus 2

Repeat Chorus 1

Repeat Verse (x2)

Repeat Chorus 2

Know that the Lord is God (*repeat 3x*)

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Dear Family,

Like us, kids are busy. Their lives are filled with split-second images, fast-food dinners, quick conversations, and extracurricular competitions. This year we're going to give kids less noise and more time to experience God as we dwell in God's Word together each week. Your child's group is called "Imagine"—every time we meet we'll be entering one of God's stories, and then living into and out of it together. For the next six weeks we'll be learning stories about Abraham and Sarah, the Birth of Isaac, Rebekah and Isaac, Jacob and Esau, Baby Moses, and Moses and the Burning Bush

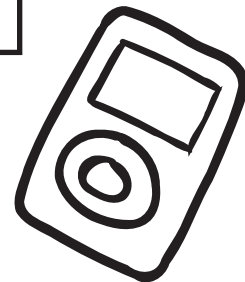
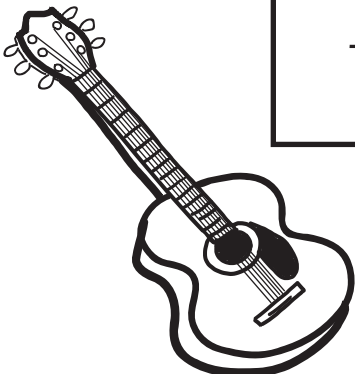
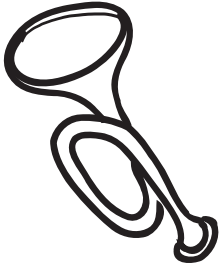
Each week your child will bring home a Show and Share paper designed to help kids show and share what they've learned at church with you at home. Every story we learn has a story symbol that will help your child recall the story and see it as one part of God's big story. You'll find that story symbol on the Show and Share papers and also inside the set of God's Big Story cards you can use each day at home.

In addition to singing songs of praise, we'll be learning verses from Scripture by singing them! You can purchase your own copy of DwellSongs, the song CD we'll be using from www.faithaliveresources.org. Individual songs can also be downloaded at www.dwellcurriculum.org/music—just ask me for the titles!

We're excited to begin a new year of children's ministry and can't wait to begin this faith journey with you and your child! Please contact us if you have any questions.

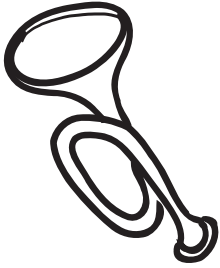
Sincerely,

P.S. Check out www.nurturekidsfaith.org for practical Christian parenting tips, recommended resources, and more! If you want to learn more about *Dwell*, visit www.dwellcurriculum.org.



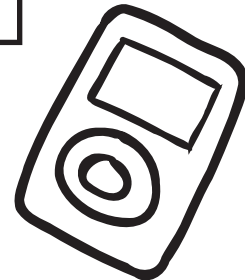
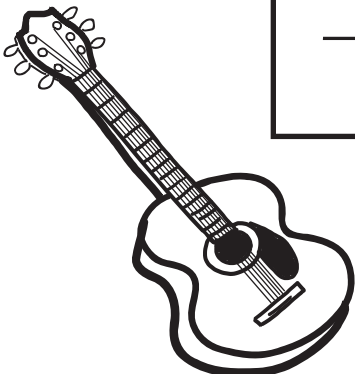
Shout for joy to the
LORD, all the earth.
Worship the LORD
with gladness;
come before him with
joyful songs.
Know that the
LORD is God.
It is he who made us,
and we are his;
we are his people,
the sheep of his
pasture.

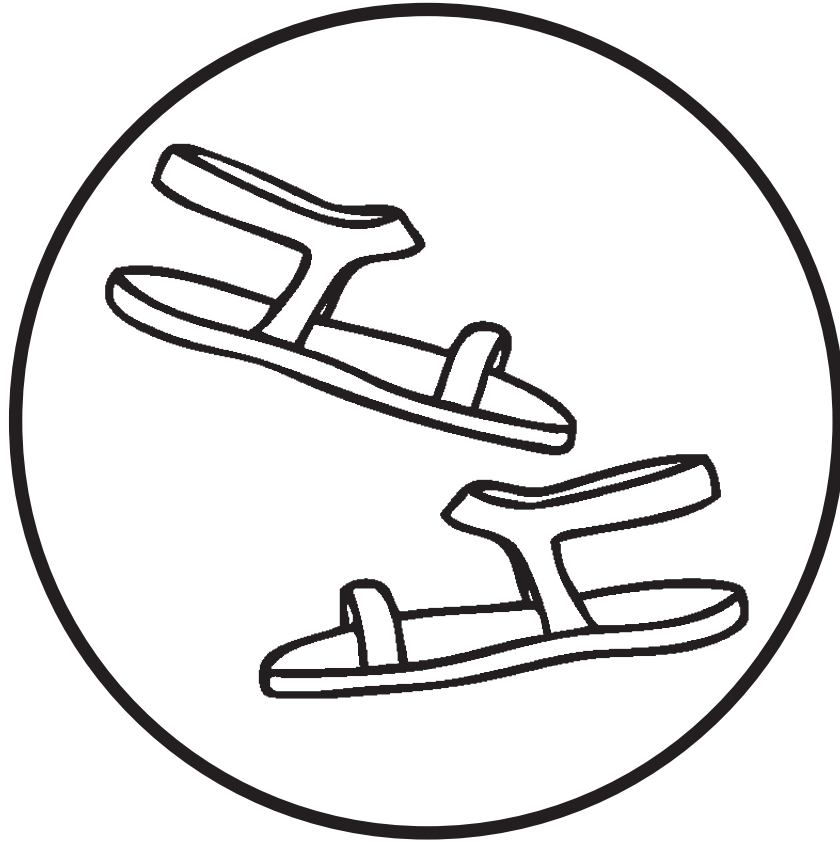
—Psalm 100:1-3, NIV



Make a joyful noise to
the LORD, all the earth.
Worship the LORD
with gladness;
come into his presence
with singing.
Know that the
LORD is God.
It is he that made us,
and we are his;
we are his people,
and the sheep of
his pasture.

—Psalm 100:1-3, NRSV

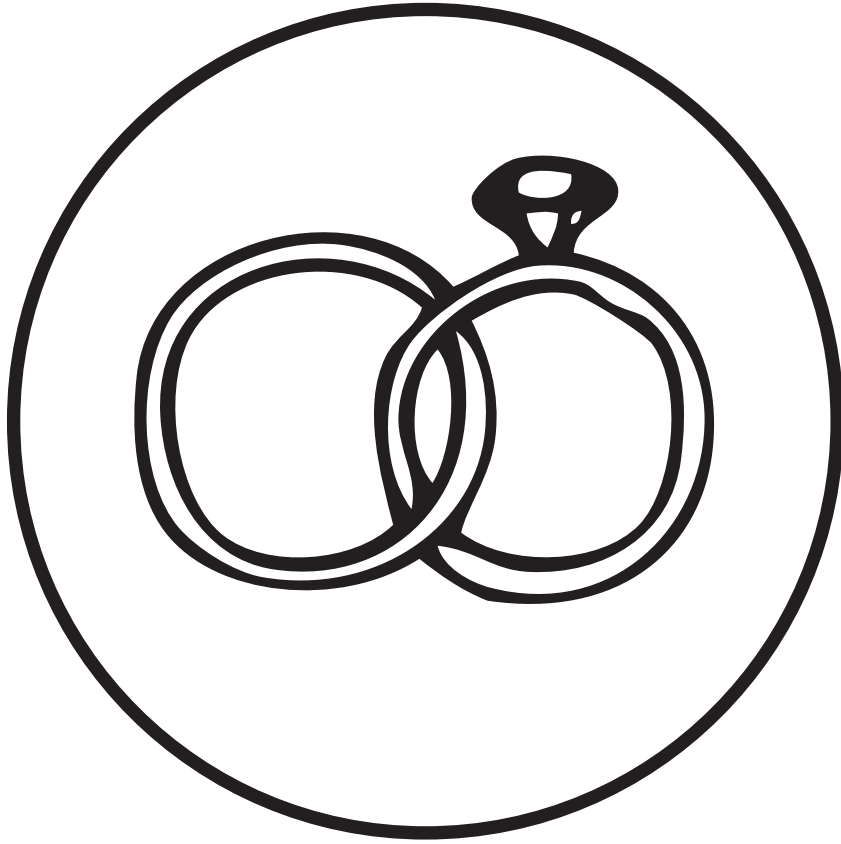




Year 1, Unit 1, Session 1



Year 1, Unit 1, Session 2



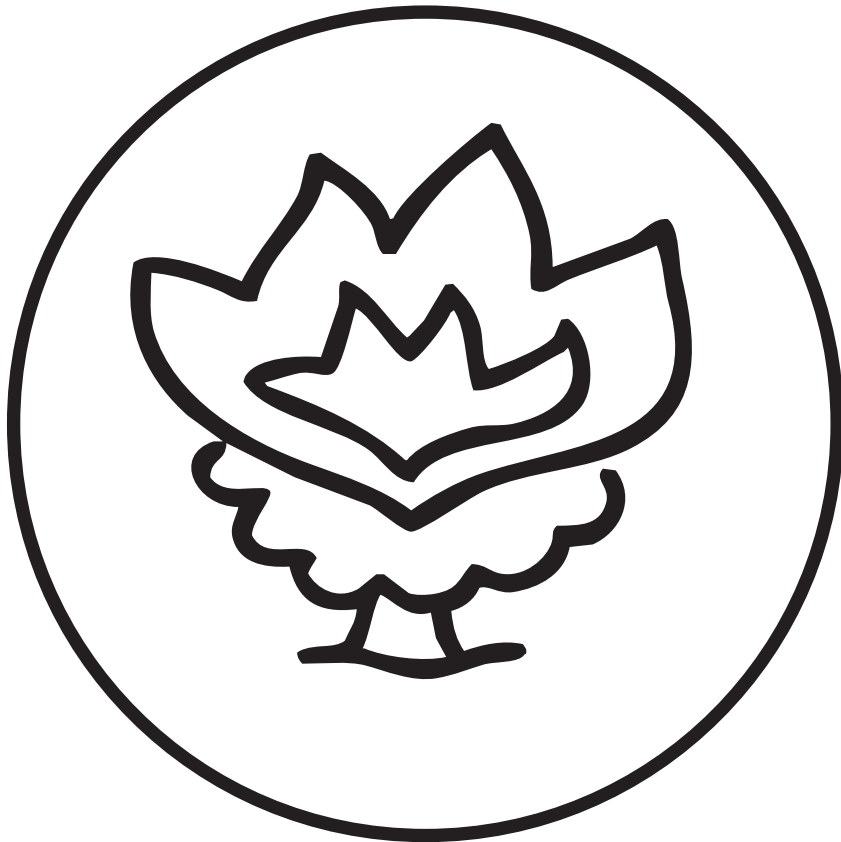
Year 1, Unit 1, Session 3



Year 1, Unit 1, Session 4

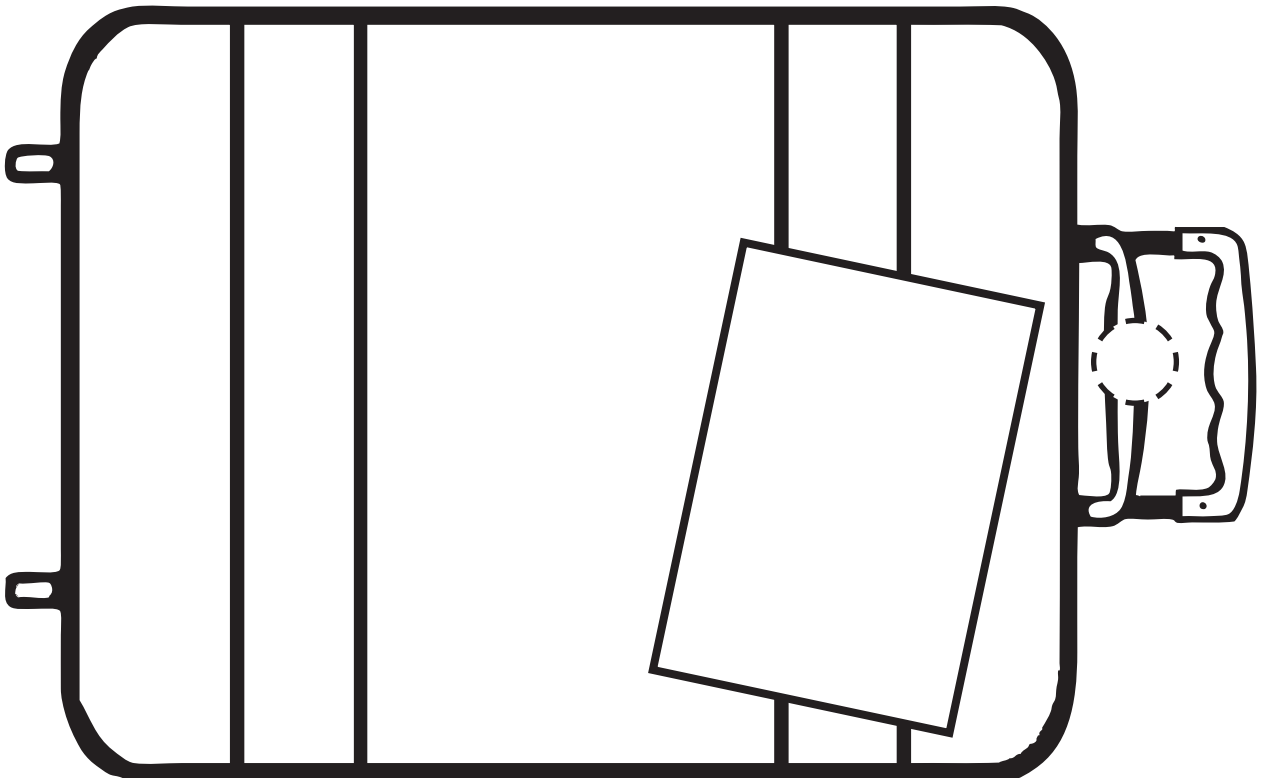
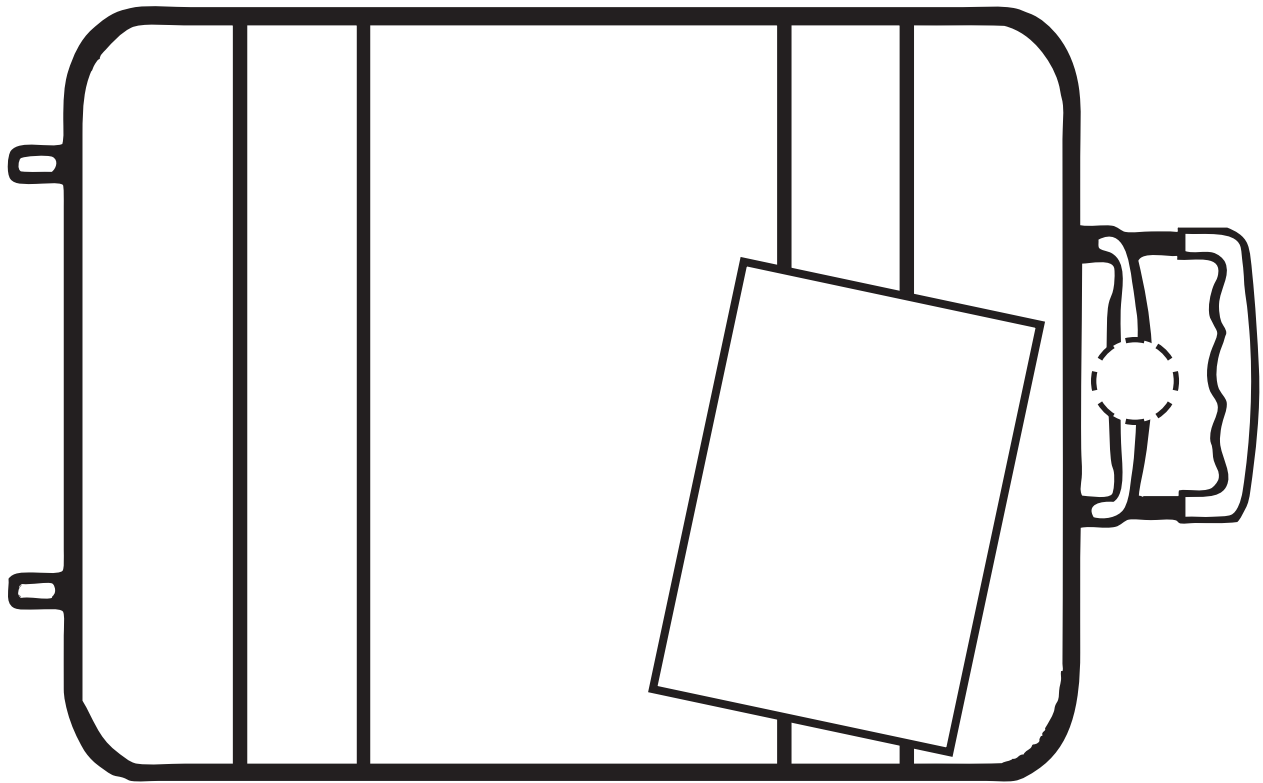


Year 1, Unit 1, Session 5

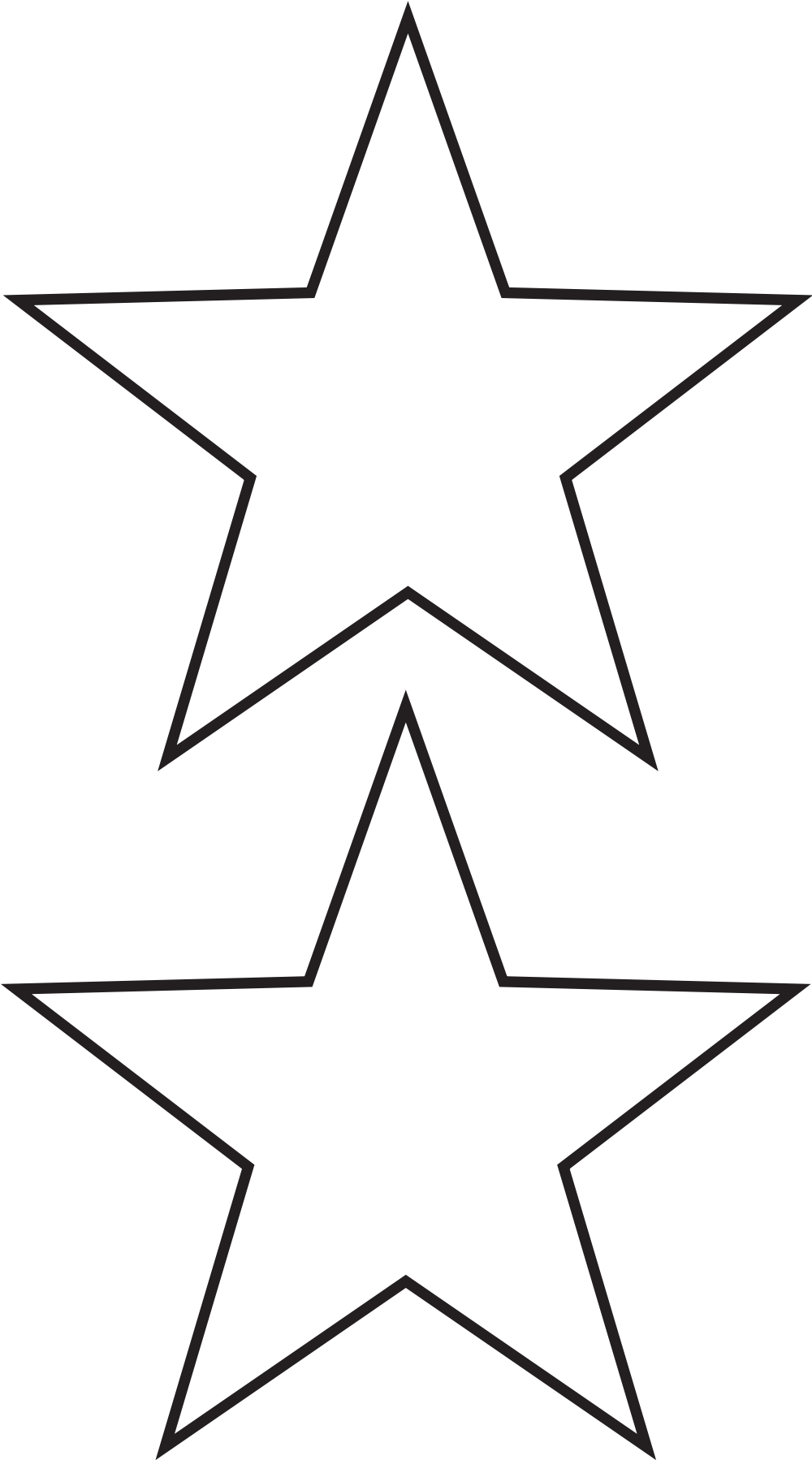


Year 1, Unit 1, Session 6

Suitcase Nametags



Star Shape





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Year 1

Unit 1 Imagine ... Being Part of God's Family

Unit 2 Imagine ... Following God's Directions

Unit 3 Imagine ... Meeting Jesus

Unit 4 Imagine ... Walking with Jesus

Unit 5 Imagine ... God's Incredible Rescue Plan

Unit 6 Imagine ... Seeing God's Power

Year 2

Unit 1 Imagine ... Trusting God

Unit 2 Imagine ... Working for God

Unit 3 Imagine ... Seeing God Do Great Things

Unit 4 Imagine ... Seeing Jesus' Power

Unit 5 Imagine ... God Creating Everything

Unit 6 Imagine ... Jesus Caring for Us


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