**1. Motivate**

When have you had a scheme that you concocted backfire on you?

* house we wanted to buy turned out to have many hidden problems
* special vacation just didn’t work out
* tried to fix the dryer but it ended up ruining a load of clothes
* did landscaping myself, but all the plants died
* the shed I built fell down in a minor windstorm
* purchased a musical instrument on Craig’s list and it turned out to have too many problems to fix

A video introduction to the lesson is available. View at <https://watch.liberty.edu/media/t/1_fgpc25sh> . If you have no Wi-Fi where you teach, best to download to your computer from <https://tinyurl.com/4389dcsb>

* invested in a “sure thing” and the company went bust
* jury rigged a TV antenna and it got zapped by lightning due to improper groundi

**2. Transition**

After we have one of those situations, we can be afraid to try anything else new.

* Failures can discourage and disappoint
* God wants to redeem our failures

**3. Bible Study**

3.1 Don’t Take Matters into Your Own Hands

Listen for Sarai’s “solution”.

Genesis 16:1-5 (NIV) Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; 2 so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said. 3 So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. 4 He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. 5 Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me."

What was Sarai’s plan to deal with her barrenness?

* she had an Egyptian maidservant who was younger, healthy
* she could be a “surrogate” (substitute, alternate, backup) wife who would be more likely to bear a child
* was not uncommon in that culture

What about the plan proved it to be ill-conceived?

* once Hagar became pregnant, she considered herself better, more important than Sarai
* she began to despise Sarai
* she saw herself as superior, since she could have children
* figured she was the “better” wife

How did Sarai respond after Hagar became pregnant?

* upset with the shift in attitudes
* afraid Abram wouldn’t hold her in same importance as before
* blamed Abram for the whole scheme (which she had come up with)
* also seemed to pass some responsibility to God
* “May the Lord judge between you and me” seems like name dropping

*When* are we tempted to take shortcuts?

* when time is of the essence, we are impatient
* when we don’t see things happening as soon as we like
* when we are tired, weary, frustrated
* when we don’t know any other way to make something happen
* when we want to “help God”

*Why* are we tempted to take ungodly steps to achieve a godly goal?

* we think the end justifies the means
* a little bad is overbalanced by all the good that would eventually result
* we can help God out with this minor short-cut
* we lack faith in God’s power, authority, love. wisdom
* we think we know better than God
* unbelief

So, what was wrong with Abram sleeping with Hagar to gain an heir?

* having a second wife (in their culture) was not the wrong
* doing it to “help God” meant they were not trusting God
* they were not acting in faith
* they failed to believe God’s promises, God’s words

God has given us a mind, so how can we know when to rely on logic as we are trying to serve God faithfully?

* check whether or not the decision agrees with the principles of God’s Word
* pray for direction – then be ready to go with what God reveals to you
* remember that the ends do not always justify the means

3.2 Do What God Expects of You

Listen for what God expects of Abram.

Genesis 17:1-3 (NIV) When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. 2 I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." 3 Abram fell facedown, and God said to him,

Note the chronology of this event in relationship to Abram’s initial call and even the event involving Sarai and Hagar.

* Abram now 99 years old
* initial call was when he was 75
* 86 when Ishmael was born (Gen. 16)

How did the Lord identify Himself?

* the LORD (Jehovah God) appeared to him
* I am God Almighty

What two expectations did He have for Abram?

* walk before me
* be blameless
* I will confirm our covenant

What do you think God meant by “walk before me?”

* to be directed by God
* to live in obedience
* live a moral life that is pleasing to God

What about the blameless? Is that an impossible perfection?

* rather it is completeness, maturity
* This is a similar description as given Noah, Genesis 6:9 “Noah was a righteous man, *blameless* among the people of his time, and he *walked with God*.”
* It can be thought of as God's goal for our lives – obedient people of faith will be growing closer and closer to this ideal

⇒ God expects His people to walk with Him in faith and to walk before Him in a way that is pleasing to Him

How might Abrtam be struggling with God's plan for his life?

* seemed impossible
* seemed like too much responsibility
* seemed far fetched
* hard to understand – was beyond his sphere of experience
* he was dealing with day to day issues – the livestock, the crops, the servants – God is talking about long range (several centuries, even eternal) plans

How do *we* struggle with accepting God's will for our lives?

* we think we could never do it
* it involves significant commitments of time, resources
* we cannot grasp the scope of God's workings, God's plans
* we feel that He might be interrupting our plans
* we think we know a better way to do it

⇒ We should know that God is able to do all that is needed

3.3 God Seeks a Covenant Relationship with Us

Listen for covenant details.

Genesis 17:4-9 (NIV) "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. 5 No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. 7 I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. 8 The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God." 9 Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come.

What promise did the Lord reaffirm?

* this is our covenant … it is still in place, it hasn’t changed
* you will be the father of many nations (stated two times)
* changed his name to reflect this reaffirmation
* promised to make him fruitful – he and Sarah *would* have a child
* this is an everlasting covenant – it extends to your descendants

Though the covenant was described as everlasting, what expectation did the Lord have for Abraham and his descendants?

* they were to keep God’s covenant
* obedience to God
* faithfulness
* faith, trust
* applied to all the succeeding generations

What is the relevance of God's covenant with Abraham have for us today?

* we are one of the many nations/peoples of which Abraham is our *spiritual* father
* God *did* accomplish what He said He would do for Abraham
* He can accomplish His promises for us in just the same way – not always early, but never late – in His time
* His purposes include our lives but go far beyond our time and our immediate sphere of existence

What kinds of things does God make new in our lives as we walk with Him?

* situations where we have to trust God’s guidance and provision
* heals our relationship with Him after failures
* accomplishes good things in our lives that we neither expect nor deserve
* honor our faith
* answers prayers – sometimes quickly, sometimes after years of trusting Him
* He blesses unexpectedly
* He works out situations, problems in ways that are better than we would ever have hoped for

Use the last page as a handout so your learners can take home the application points of this week’s lesson.

Application

Own it.

* Take some time and ask God to search out your heart.
* Identify any mistakes or failures that rise to the surface.
* Stop pretending. Stop playing the game. Stop hiding and take responsibility. Now is the time to own up to it.

Confess it.

* Don’t delay; remember every moment counts.
* Literally change your position right now if you are physically able and get on your knees.
* Go before the holy living God and seek His forgiveness.
* Let Him know how much you hate that specific sin in your life.

Believe it.

* Remember His forgiveness is instant; it is not a journey.
* Trust in the power of His forgiveness.
* Don’t doubt it. Stand up. Suit up. The dirt is gone. You are clean. Keep playing.
* Then tell someone else about the victory He has given you.

Cryptogram Puzzle

Our consulate in Prizainmy has just received this coded message from one of their local operatives. He has previously failed to communicate, but we’ve offered him this chance to get things right. Our decoding staff are all participating in a middle school Lego robotics competition. So, we need your help to get this message out to your church. The Key is on the left and below is an example of how it works. Pass the decrypted message to your missions chairman. Help and other intriguing activities are available at <https://tinyurl.com/4389dcsb>

