

Leader Guide

Week 3: Abram and Sarai in Egypt

Genesis 12:10-20

Story Synopsis:

Abram and Sarai left Caanan for Egypt in a time of famine. Because he was afraid that the Egyptians would kill him to take Sarai, Abram asked Sarai to lie and say that she was his sister rather than his wife. Believing her to be Abram's sister, Pharaoh took Sarai into his harem and gave Abram great wealth. But God rescued Sarai and Pharaoh released her. Through the study of this story, we will learn that though people in our lives can and will disappoint or even betray us, God, sees, knows, and cares about our painful/difficult situations. God is both rescuer and redeemer of both men and women.

The Story:

Abram is introduced in chapter 12 as a great man of faith. God told him to leave his country and his father's house and journey to a land God would show him (Gen. 12:1-3). God promised Abram great blessings for his obedience. Abram obeyed. Yet immediately after his great act of faith, Abram is shown in all his human frailty. During his sojourn in Egypt, Abram's fear caused him to lie and to betray his wife, Sarai, to protect himself. Despite Abram's weakness, God revealed himself as rescuer and redeemer.

Abram was driven to Egypt by famine in the land of Canaan. This was not uncommon. The production of food in Canaan was dependent on the scarce amount of rain, while Egypt's agriculture depended on the Nile's annual flood cycle. The different ecological systems meant that Egypt was often able to produce food while Canaan was experiencing drought.

As they came near to Egypt, Abram asked Sarai to lie to protect him. Fearing that the Egyptians would kill him to take Sarai because of her beauty, Abram asked Sarai to say that she was his sister rather than his wife. The motivations for Abram's lie are somewhat murky. It is true that the kings of the Ancient Near East had a reputation for taking whatever woman they chose. Fathers, brothers, or husbands who got in the way could be killed. Abraham may simply have been fearful. Interpreters have tried to save Abram's reputation in other ways. One suggestion was that adopting a wife as a sister could improve her social status. This is not reflected in the Abram/Sarai story, however. It is clear from the text that Abram was seeking his own self-preservation. A more likely possibility is that if Abram presented himself as Sarai's brother, any Egyptian seeking to possess her might

first approach Abram for negotiations, allowing time to escape. However, this still presents difficulties since it appears that Abram did indeed sell Sarai to Pharaoh (Gen 12:16).

If Abram was hoping that his lie would buy time for negotiation and escape, the ruse failed. Pharaoh had no need to negotiate. Hearing of Sarai's beauty, Pharaoh took her into his house. Abram was rewarded richly. The list of rewards in verse 16 is a stock phrase used to describe the very wealthy. Abram was no longer a penniless wanderer; Pharaoh greatly compensated Abram for his 'sister.'

The complications are obvious. Abram had become a possessor of great wealth, but he had lost Sarai. Without a wife, how would he have the promised descendants to inherit the land (12:7)? Abram lied to protect himself, but his deception didn't only put Sarai at risk – God's promise was at stake as well.

Sarai does not speak throughout the episode. We can only wonder of her thoughts and feelings. Did she feel betrayed by her husband? Did she feel unvalued, unwanted, or unloved? Abram had saved himself, but he risked Sarai's virtue, reputation, and the possibility that she might be a member of Pharaoh's harem for the rest of her life.

We should note that though Abram appeared to profit from his deception, his wealth caused problems for him throughout the rest of his life. Starting in chapter 13, Abram's increased wealth led to conflict with his nephew Lot and their eventual separation. Then there is the later tension within his household over the Egyptian maid Hagar (16:1-6; 21:9-14). Was Hagar one of the 'female servants' Pharaoh gifted to Abram? Interestingly, when Sarai told Abram to have a child with Hagar, she used the same formula for her request that Abram used when he asked her to lie (12:13; 16:2). Perhaps Sarai's request was a claim on the debt Abram owed her for her silence. Certainly Abram's lie created separation and animosity between him and his wife. It was not the first time in Genesis that sin caused division between man and woman (3:11-12).

Abram's lie embroiled him in a situation that required divine action. Only God could rescue Sarai from Pharaoh's harem. Though God does not always rescue His people from the consequences of their own sin, in this case God did intervene and rescued Sarai. God sent plagues on the house of Pharaoh. The text does not specify the nature of the diseases or how Pharaoh knew they were due to Sarai's presence within his household. Faced with divine retribution for his unconscious error, Pharaoh immediately summoned Abram and confronted him with three pointed questions. Abram was not given a chance to answer; his silence implied his guilt. Pharaoh returned Sarai and forcibly escorted them from Egypt.

We best understand this story when we consider it within the context of the larger narrative. The story of Abraham and Sarai is the story of God's plan to bless the nations and eventually bring redemption through this family. Yet God's plan is worked out through

fallible human beings. In this story, we see that God is gracious enough to rescue and redeem even when we fail. But it also reveals that it is foolish to use deception in order to save ourselves. With God as our rescuer and redeemer, why would we ever need to lie?

Points of Application:

- God is a rescuer. Abram's deception embroiled him and Sarai in a situation from which they could not escape, but God graciously intervened to rescue Sarai. God rescues us from the prison of our own sin.
- There is no need to lie to protect ourselves. God was able to safely rescue Sarai from Pharaoh's household. Surely God could also have rescued Abram and Sarai both from harm at the hands of the Egyptians. Abram's lie was an attempt at self-preservation, but it only led to increased danger. Abram's lie showed his lack of faith; he did not trust that God could protect him from the power of the Egyptians.
- Both men and women are valuable to God. Abram lived in a time in which women were treated as property and could be viewed as disposable. In his actions toward Sarai, Abram did not rise above the culture of his time. Yet throughout Scripture, God reveals that both men and women are valuable to him. Women such as Sarai are also important in God's plan.

Group Guide

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Opener:

Two Truths and a Lie: Ask everyone to write on a piece of paper THREE things about themselves which may not be known to the others in the group. Two are true and one is not. Taking turns they read out the three 'facts' about themselves and the rest of the group votes which are true and false. There are always surprises. This simple activity is always fun, and helps the group and leaders get to know more about each other.

Study the Scripture:

Read through Genesis 12 as a group.

Less time? Read the synopsis in the leader guide.

Questions for Reflection:

- Have you ever lied to get yourself out of an uncomfortable situation? What were the results?
- What are some ways in which you are more impacted by your culture rather than by biblical standards? What are some ways in which you see the church today rise above our culture?
- How do you feel about a patriarch of our faith selling his own wife? What does that tell us about God's redemption, not just for survivors of trafficking, but also for the perpetrators?
- When you face difficulty, is your first response to seek God's leadership, or is it to look to your own resources? Why?

Abram, Sarai, and Trafficking

Sarai was betrayed by her husband. While it's hard to believe that parents, grandparents, brothers, or sisters could force a member of their own family into prostitution, trafficking by a family member is one path into prostitution.¹ Additionally, domestic violence is a “push factor” for trafficking. Victims of domestic violence who lack the support needed to leave for a safe environment can become vulnerable to traffickers. Children who have been abused or exploited by a family member need to know that they are not alone.

We could say that Abram “pimped” Sarai. Admittedly, this is a modern reading. Neither Abram nor Pharaoh would have seen their actions in this light. Still, Abram unmistakably profited from Sarai's ‘sale.’ Only divine intervention rescued Sarai before she was brought before Pharaoh. The fact that Abram later repeated his deception (Genesis 20:1-17) also casts a negative light on his actions.

Today, one of the factors driving domestic sex trafficking is the glorification of pimp culture. Artists like Jay-Z, Snoop, and 50 cent—and their corporate sponsors—have helped to make pimping look glamorous and exciting. They help equate masculinity with misogyny and violence. The reality is that pimps seek out the girls and boys who are most vulnerable and insecure, woo them into dependence on the pimp, and then keep them under control through drugs and violence while they force them to work the track. The real victims are the girls and boys whom pimps abuse and control.

Unfortunately, manipulation works. Re-read Genesis 20:13. Abram uses the exact line traffickers use to manipulate. “If you really love me you'll ____”. Often it is something like, “if you love me you'll help us make money to support ourselves. You're just so beautiful that other people want to experience you”. Manipulation when tied with “love” is very tricky. We often do unthinkable things because of our human need and desire for love. The bars that hold men and women in sex trafficking are a complicated mixture of love and fear.

Abram was influenced by a culture which viewed women as property. We'd like to think we've progressed in this regard but we live in a culture in which Charlie Sheen's antics gain him a seat at the center of a media circus while the women he abused are overlooked or vilified. Stores sell thong underwear and push-up bras marketed for 7-10 year olds, and stars trot out their young daughters in heels, miniskirts, and lipstick.² The commercial sex

¹ Brian Rogers, “Girl says family forced her into prostitution” (August 13, 2010), *Houston Chronicle*. Retrieved from: <http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/metropolitan/7151453.html>; Amy Fine Collins, “Sex Trafficking of Americans: The Girls Next Door” (May 24, 2011) *Vanity Fair Online*. Retrieved from: <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2011/05/sex-trafficking-201105?currentPage=all>

² Leah Hardy, “From One Worried Mother” (February 11, 2010), *Daily Mail Online*. Retrieved from: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1249538/From-worried-mother-passionate-arms--Its-time-stop-fashion-industry-dressing-girls-like-this.html#ixzz1MwMfkVWf>

industry is driven in part by a culture that presents even children as sexual beings. Both boys and girls need to know that they are worth more than the sum of their parts.³

Group Activity

Chose three volunteers to stand up and read these survivor testimonies from the Polaris Project⁴:

Mari

My name is Mari. I am a 37-year-old African American woman who had been in a relationship with Darrell for 16 years. During that time we had four children. Over the course of the relationship, Darrell had been verbally, physically and sexually abusive towards me. Additionally, when Darrell wanted extra money, he called friends of his and forced me into commercial sex. I have tried to leave Darrell in the past; however, he either threatened to hurt our children, or convinced me that I had no other options other than staying with him. He controlled all of my money, did not allow me to keep my own bank account, and forbade me from getting her driver's license. I could not see any alternatives for leaving.

One evening, Darrell, me and an 18 year-old, Janice, who Darrell was also forcing into prostitution, were pulled over by a patrol officer for a traffic violation. The officer noticed that when Darrell pulled out his identification he had my and the other girls' ID in his wallet. The officer was suspicious and asked to speak to them all privately. During his conversation the officer realized both women were being forced and coerced into prostitution. He referred both women to Polaris Project for emergency services. Polaris Project helped find temporary housing and provided food and clothing for both women. Janice immediately left Darrell and found a job in a restaurant. I relocated out of state with my children, but I still struggle daily with my decision to leave Darrell. I understand that it is best for me and my children, and believes that more and more every day.

Jennifer

My name is Jennifer. I am a 17-year-old white female who grew up in rural Ohio. I ran away from home a few times because my mom and stepfather drank a lot and did not pay attention to me. A few months ago I was walking to the store alone and a 30-year-old male drove up beside me and told me how pretty I was and asked why I looked so sad. I told him that I was angry with my mom and just needed to take a walk. He asked if he could take me to get my nails done down the street to cheer me

³ Vicki Courtney, *5 Conversations You Must Have with Your Daughter* (Nashville: B&H, 2008).

⁴ <http://www.polarisproject.org/what-we-do/client-services/survivor-stories>

up, and I agreed. He paid right away while giving compliments and telling me he wanted to meet again the next day.

For the next two months Jack picked me up and took me to eat, to get my nails done and continued to act like a loving boyfriend. We both began calling each other boyfriend and girlfriend. We spent a lot of time together and he asked me to move in with him, but after another month of living together he told her me couldn't make the rent payment and needed help. He asked me to go on dates with older men and engage in commercial sex. I felt uncomfortable but agreed because I would do anything not to return home, and wanted to make him happy. Jack praised me and told me he didn't mind that I helped them get money for rent this way. This continued until one night when I was out on the street and was raped by a stranger who initially solicited me for sex. I immediately called the police and was taken to the hospital for an exam.

Once at the hospital, the responding detectives called Polaris Project client services and two staff members reported to the hospital. Polaris Project provided emergency housing and emotional support for me as I considered some of my options. I decided to leave Jack and move into a shelter. During me month at the shelter, Polaris Project found long-term housing for me and helped me secure a part-time job. Within four months, I saved enough money to move into my own apartment. I continue to work part-time and attend classes in the evenings. I hopes to attend college next year and eventually own my own business.

Tyrone

My name is Tyrone and I am a 16-year-old African American originally from Florida. I was raised by my aunt until I was 10 years old and then placed in the foster care system. At the age of 14, I first ran away from my foster family to avoid sexual harassment from one of my foster family uncles.

During that time, I met "Mastur D", a 26-year-old man who offered to help me get back to my biological family. He said he would be able to pay for some of the expenses to get me there, but that I needed to help support financially by engaging in sexual acts. With no money or other options I took him up on his offer. He drove me back to Florida but insisted when we arrived that I had not earned enough money to cover our hotel and gas costs. He physically assaulted me and told me that I would never see anyone else in my family if I did not engage in sex with other men of his choosing. I felt I had no other choice and continued to earn money for Mastur D to pay him back for the money he paid for me to get back to Florida. I was arrested for solicitation in Florida and after serving time in a juvenile detention center was returned to my foster family and was therefore returned to sexual harassment by

my foster family uncle. I ran away again a year later and called Mastur D to help me get back to Florida. He agreed to help again. I was arrested again.

While participating in an outreach group at a detention center, I reached out to a Polaris Project social worker and told her parts of my story. Polaris Project immediately stepped in to provide emotional support and additional social services. The social worker helped me talk to my case manager at the detention center about what happened and helped my probation officer understand other options for support instead of a detention center and returning to my foster family. I now have protection order against Mastur D and was able to leave the detention center and go to an out-of-state residential program for young boys who were victims of sex trafficking. I am doing well in my program and am almost finished with my GED.

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the force, coercion and fraud in these stories.
2. How might they have felt similar to Sarai in the Bible?
3. How could your church/family involvement prevent situations like these from arising?

Closing Prayer

John 3:19-21

19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

Dear God,

Today we pray for the men that are hurting others and hurting themselves. Pray that God would change their hearts, pierce their consciences, and bring about deep repentance. Pray that the darkness of their hearts and their actions might be brought into the light, that their shameful deeds done in secret might be exposed so that more victims are not harmed.

We pray that you will use us to bring light into this dark place.

Amen

Taking it home

Did You Know?

- Each year, as many as 100,000-300,000 American children are at risk of being trafficked for commercial sex in the United States.⁵
- The average age a girl enters the commercial sex trade is 12-14 years old. For boys, it's even younger – just 11-13 years old.⁶

Research has shown that children who have experienced sexual abuse are more likely to be trafficked than children who have not experienced sexual abuse. This abuse could be a stranger, or a family member or friend. Predators often manipulate children like Abram manipulated Sarai and tell them terrible lies about themselves. Creating an environment where children can confess abuse is a parent's job. We also need to protect our children from becoming victims.

Family Activity:

This week start the monthly habit of having a special “date night” with each of your children. In addition to checking on their hearts, use this as an opportunity to talk to them one-on-one about sexual abuse before it happens. It's also important to model healthy relationships for your children. Take them on parent-child “dates” so they can see what healthy relationships look like.

Talking to your children about sexual abuse

Here are some great tips from the U.S. Department of Justice:⁷

- When you empower your children to say “no” to unwanted touch and teach them that they can come to you with questions and concerns, you take critical steps to preventing child sexual abuse.
- Talk to your children about sexuality and sexual abuse in age-appropriate terms. Talking openly and directly about sexuality teaches children that it is okay to talk to you when they have questions.
- Teach children the names of their body parts so that they have the language to ask questions and express concerns about those body parts.
- Teach children that some parts of their bodies are private.
 - Let children know that other people should not be touching or looking at their private parts unless they need to touch them to provide care. If someone does need to touch them in those private areas, a parent or trusted caregiver should be there when it happens.

⁵ Sources: U.S. Department of Justice, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

⁶ ibid

⁷ <http://www.nsopr.gov/en/Education/TalkingChild>

- Tell children that if someone tries to touch those private areas or wants to look at them OR if someone tries to show them his or her own private parts, they should tell a trusted adult as soon as possible.
- Teach your child boundaries and that it's okay to say "no" to touches that make him or her uncomfortable or scared.
 - Teach your child how to say "no" when he or she is uncomfortable or scared and that he or she should tell a trusted adult as soon as possible.
 - Respect a child's boundaries in play, teasing, and affection.
 - Assure your child that it is okay to get help, even if someone he or she cares about might be upset or embarrassed.
 - Know that telling a trusted adult can lead to a slightly embarrassing situation for you, your child, and those involved.
 - A child who then says he or she does not want to give a relative a hug or kiss can create tension. Do not force the child to give the relative a hug or a kiss, because it is sending the wrong message to the child and teaches the child to ignore his or her confusing or uncomfortable feelings to the point where he or she does it anyway. Work with your child to find ways to greet people that do not involve uncomfortable kinds of touch.
- Talk openly about sexuality and sexual abuse to teach your child that these topics do not need to be "secret." Abusers will sometimes tell a child that the abuse should be kept a secret. Let your child know that if someone is touching him or her or talking to him or her in ways that make him or her uncomfortable or scared, that it should not stay a secret.
 - Abusers rely on the child's likelihood of not telling an adult.
 - Assure your child that he or she will not get into trouble if he or she tells you this kind of secret.

But Here's the Most Important Thing To Do:

These conversations should be ongoing, open, and casual. Do not try to put all this information into one big "talk" about sex.

- Talking about sexuality and sexual abuse should be routine conversations.
- Use everyday issues to begin conversations to help avoid a big "talk" about sex.

Warning Signs of Sexual Abuse⁸

Physical Signs

- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Bloody, torn, or stained underclothes
- Bleeding, bruises, or swelling in genital area
- Pain, itching, or burning in genital area
- Frequent urinary or yeast infections

⁸ <http://www.rainn.org/get-information/types-of-sexual-assault/child-sexual-abuse>

- Sexually Transmitted Infections, especially if under 14 years old
- Pregnancy, especially if under 14 years old

Behavioral Signs

- Reports sexual abuse
- Inappropriate sexual knowledge
- Inappropriate sexual behavior
- Nightmares or bed-wetting
- Large weight changes/major changes in appetite
- Suicide attempts or self-harming, especially in adolescents
- Shrinks away or seems threatened by physical contact
- Runs away
- Overly protective and concerned for siblings, assumes a caretaker role
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or Rape Trauma Syndrome symptoms

Common Reactions

- Withdrawal
- Depression
- Sleeping & eating disorders
- Self-mutilation
- Phobias
- Psychosomatic symptoms (stomachaches, headaches)
- School problems (absences, drops in grades)
- Poor hygiene/excessive bathing
- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Regressive behaviors - thumb-sucking, etc.

For more resources, please visit:

- [List of Organizations Serving Survivors of Sexual Violence per State](#)
- [National Sexual Assault Hotline](#) at 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)
- [National Sexual Violence Resource Center](#)