

J O U R N E Y O F A M I L I T A R Y W I F E

Dedicated Steps of Faith in God's Plan

SMALL GROUP FACILITATOR GUIDE

(JOURNEY 1)

A Channel of Blessing (Week 1)

Waypoints 1–5 · Genesis 12:1–3

Materials needed

- Whiteboard
- *Channel of Blessing* Chart/Markers

Stop and get your bearings (10 minutes)

- Begin the class with prayer.
- Ask if anyone would like to share a highlight from the readings of the past week.

Where shall we go? (10 minutes)

Turn to a partner and discuss the following questions:

- What was the most significant journey you ever took?
- What was one thing that made the journey memorable?

As a class discuss (*if time permits*):

- What were the benefits of the journey?
- Did you learn anything about yourself, your family, or another traveling companion?
- Did you learn anything about God on the journey?

Read the map (10 minutes)

Pilgrimage or journey is a recurring theme throughout the Old Testament. The theme goes deeper than simply taking a trip to physically get from one place to another. The journeys emphasize God's presence along the way with people who are willing to obey and trust him.

In Genesis 12:1 you met a man named Abram, who would later become known as Abraham. He was told to leave his home and go to a land of which he knew nothing. God used two action words with Abraham that military families know well: "Leave" and "Go."

If this directive is taken at face value it doesn't seem like such a challenge, but when you look at the culture of the Near East in the day of Abraham, you see this challenge was more than meets the eye. In Abraham's day, to leave family was literally to leave your significance and security. God asked Abraham to leave his country—his nationality, his clan—his identity, and his father's house—his inheritance, and go to a land God would show him.¹

How can you, as someone in a military community, relate to what God asked of Abraham?

God asked Abraham to give up things of great importance in order to focus on "the land" he would show him. At least when a military family gets PCS orders there's usually a destination! Still, God didn't leave Abraham completely in the dark. He made some promises.

¹ Bill T. Arnold. *Encountering the Book of Genesis*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 72.

Take time to explore (20 minutes)

What are the promises listed in Genesis 12:1–3? (List responses on whiteboard.)

1. I will give you many descendants, and they will become a great nation
2. I will bless you
3. I will make your name famous
4. I will bless those who bless you
5. I will curse those who curse you
6. Through you I will bless all the nations

Read Genesis 11:29–30 in light of these promises. Was there any reason these promises to Abraham may have seemed a little far-fetched?

Abraham obeyed God and set out on a journey based solely on the promise he would become a channel of blessing to the world.

The word *bless* in Genesis 12 conveys spiritual and physical enrichment. Abraham is blessed physically, as we will soon discover, but the word in context places more emphasis on the spiritual blessing that God had in mind. Through Abraham God would open up blessings to others as Abraham shared his knowledge of God with them. The blessing of God on Abraham would lead to the blessing of others as they opened their minds and hearts to follow the one true God.²

God's message to Abraham was that he was to be a blessing.³ God's message to you and me is the same—we are to be a blessing.

How have you been a blessing to others since you've become a military wife?

What are ways you and your family have been blessed by military life?

Travelogue (10 minutes)

Read veteran military wife Ronda's description of her military life and underline anything that resonates with you. When everyone is finished we will take a few minutes to discuss our thoughts:

Ronda describes her life as “blessed.” She says, “I’m so thankful for all the amazing experiences I have had because I married a soldier. I have met some incredible people on this journey. Although I never thought leaving Hanover, Pennsylvania would be good for us, I was completely wrong. Leaving my hometown was and is the best thing that ever happened to me. It allowed me to experience people and places that I otherwise would not have. Even though I miss family and friends, I would not trade my life for anything else. I am blessed!”

² Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing, A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 988) 263.

³ W. Lee Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 83.

Pack your bags (10 minutes)

Join with no more than four people and have a five-minute brainstorming session on ways you can be a channel of blessing as a military wife. Have someone record your ideas to be added to a collective chart. Commit to praying for one another throughout the week and plan to report on a way you have put into practice one of the things on your list.

Gather the lists and compile them on a *Channel of Blessing* chart to display next week as a review. Close the session in prayer.

A Challenge to Faith (Week 2)

Waypoints 6–10 · Genesis 12:4–10

Materials needed

- Whiteboard
- *Channel of Blessing* chart from Week 1
- T-chart: Challenges/Blessings

Stop and get your bearings (10 minutes)

- Begin class with prayer.
- Refer to the *Channel of Blessing* chart. Ask if anyone would like to share a report of a way they put one of the action steps into practice this week.
- Ask if anyone would like to share a highlight from the readings of the past week.

Where shall we go? (10 minutes)

- Discuss with a partner the most challenging journey you have ever made. What made it challenging? Did the challenges override the pleasure of the journey? Were you tempted not to go, or turn around and go home? What made you keep going?

Read the map (10 minutes)

Read Genesis 12:4–10. What do you see as the challenges in these verses for Abraham and his traveling entourage? (Canaanites and famine)

God said he would lead Abraham to a land where he would make of him a great nation. The instruction was simple and the promise was appealing, but God did not say anything about Canaanites. At this point, Scripture does not elaborate on the Canaanites. What might their presence in the land mean to Abraham and the promise God made to him?

It is not clear why the statement “There were Canaanites in the land” was included in this passage. Perhaps it is a foreshadowing of the challenges that would come. Their presence can represent the challenges of the Christian to live by faith and not by circumstance.

Another obstacle Abraham encountered when he arrived in the land of Canaan was famine. What did he do in light of this challenge? Do you think he made the right decision?

Take time to explore (20 minutes)

Can you relate to any of the challenges Abraham faced in your own journey as a Christian?

Can you relate to any of the challenges Abraham faced in your journey as a military wife?

Assign partners or small groups to read portions of Psalm 37 (Group 1 read 37:1–5; Group 2 read 37:6–10; etc.). Discuss the challenges addressed in the Psalm and the blessings that come to those who have their steps established by the Lord. Upon completion invite groups to list on a T-chart the challenges and blessings they discover.

What can we conclude from Psalm 37 about those who allow their steps to be established by the Lord?

Travelogue (10 minutes)

Read the words of Bonnie about the challenges of being a military wife. Underline anything that stands out to you.

When asked about the challenges of being a military wife Bonnie responded: “When I’m asked about military life, I’m very careful not to paint a rosy picture. The challenges are real, the sacrifices are sure, and the headaches of living with a government system can be painful. But here’s the thing—I would do it all over in a heartbeat. The challenges of military life made me more adaptable, the sacrifices made me more compassionate, and the headaches made me more patient. I learned not to dwell on the negative, but instead to seek out friends who would help me find humor in the situation and point me to truth in God’s Word. God used the challenges to grow me. I’m forever grateful.”

What are your observations?

Pack your bags (10 minutes)

Is God asking you to take a step of faith in some area? What are the challenges that keep you from taking the first step? In the margin of your handout write one word that represents that challenge. You will be invited to speak out your word during the closing prayer.

Father, increase my awareness of your presence with me as I take steps of faith. Help me when I encounter obstacles along the way. Lord, remove the obstacles: (invite women to speak out the word to represent their obstacle). Take away my fear of stepping out in faith and replace it with confidence that you go before me, behind me, and beside me. In Jesus name, Amen.

A Choice to Trust (Week 3)

Waypoints 11–15 · Genesis 12:11–13:18

Materials needed

- Large chart paper for poster
- Colored markers
- Tape or thumbtack for hanging posters
- Small gift bags filled with both desirable and undesirable objects (see explanation below)

Stop and get your bearings (10 minutes)

- Begin class with prayer.
- Ask if anyone would like to share a highlight from the readings of the past week.

Where shall we go? (10 minutes)

- Win or lose game: Place small items—both desirable and undesirable—in gift bags, (i.e., a pack of gum, a candy bar, an emery board, a rock, a stick, etc.) You could even make the bags desirable and undesirable with no rhyme or reason to why one would be better than the other. Invite each person in the group to choose a bag and share the contents.
- What did you base your choice upon? How did you feel when you made a poor choice? When you saw some of the prettier bags did not have the best content, were you more cautious in your choice? Did you trust your instincts?

Read the map (10 minutes)

What were some of the choices you read about this week from Genesis 12 and 13?

- Abraham chose to lie about Sarah being his wife.
- Pharaoh chose to let Abraham and his family leave with gifts—and their lives.
- Lot chose the best land for himself.
- God chose to confirm the promise he made to Abraham.
- Abraham chose to walk the land symbolically taking possession of it.

(Participants may offer more ideas from their reading.)

Notice the contrast of the choice made by Abraham in Waypoint 11 compared to the choice he made in Waypoint 15. He went from walking in fear in not telling Pharaoh that Sarah was his sister to walking in faith, as he symbolically possessed the land.

To what do you attribute this change?

Actually, the two situations in Abraham's life present faith the way it really is: a mixture of caution and trust.⁴ The important thing to remember is that in all the situations we read about this week, God was at work. Yes, our faith will grow as we walk with God, but it is God's faithfulness to us and to his promises

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982), 134.

that make that happen. “Trust me” are words God says to each of us. He does not trick us, or coerce us to trust him. He graciously allows us to choose trust as we allow him to direct our steps.

Take time to explore (20 minutes)

Join with two other people and read the verses below. Develop a plan for making the choice to trust God based on biblical principles found in these scriptures. Make a creative poster of your plan to share with the larger group.

- Psalm 119:44–45
- Joshua 1:8
- Proverbs 3:5–6
- John 16:13
- Proverbs 13:20
- Psalm 1:1

Travelogue (10 minutes)

Young military wife Bethany writes about some choices she has made in her journey. Read her account and underline what resonates with you.

Being a military wife was foreign territory for me when my husband enlisted. However, being in unfamiliar territory was not new to me, due to mission trips, study abroad, and living overseas for the first four years of our marriage. I took what I learned from those experiences, and I purposed in my heart to trust God in the newest “unknown” ahead of me, to go forward open-minded and open-hearted.

I truly have grown in my faith and my walk with God since my husband joined the Army. I have come to see how loved and accepted I am by God and that He really is sovereign and trustworthy.

My husband and I recently attended a marriage seminar. Spending that weekend together, along with putting into practice the tools we learned there have been one of the best things for our marriage. I believe it is important to be purposeful in doing things to strengthen your marriage. I have been very thankful we had that opportunity before my husband deployed, and I believe our communication through the deployment has been better because of it.

What are your observations?

Pack your bags (10 minutes)

Waypoint 15 described two friends who walked in their military community and prayed for one another, their families, and their military community. If weather permits join with one other person and take a five-minute walk outside. As you walk, share and pray for one personal need and one need you see in your community.

A Champion of Righteousness (Week 4)

Waypoints 16–20 · Genesis 14:11–16:2

Materials needed

- Whiteboard
- Recording of song “You Are For Me” by Kari Jobe

Stop and get your bearings (10 minutes)

- Begin class with prayer.
- Ask if anyone would like to share a highlight from the readings of the past week.

Where shall we go? (10 minutes)

- With a partner answer this question and give a brief explanation of your word choice:
If there were prizes for _____ I would be the champion.

Read the map (10 minutes)

The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines champion as “someone who fights or speaks publicly in support of a person, belief, or cause.”

What were some situations you read about this week that called for a champion? Responses may include:

- Lot in need of a rescue (Genesis 14:11–13)
- Abraham against enemy armies (Genesis 14:14–16)
- Abraham doubting God’s promise (Genesis 15:2)
- Sarah’s desire to be a mother (Genesis 16:1–2)

How was God the champion in all these situations?

What words of greeting does God use in addressing Abraham in Genesis 15:1? Fear not.

What cause would Abraham have to be fearful? God promised a son and after ten years there was still no evidence of the promise.

God tells Abraham, “your reward shall be very great” (Genesis 15:1b).

“Here the reward is not a prize that is earned but a special recognition given to a faithful servant of the king who has performed a bold or risky service. Abraham and Sarah are called to live their lives against barrenness. The ‘reward’ calls them to live as creatures of hope in a situation of hopelessness . . . the rewards must be articulated as the generous response of God to those who heed his call and share his life. That is what is offered Abraham in the face of barrenness.”⁵

What does Genesis 15:6 say about Abraham? “Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.” The word ‘credit’ is a word that was used by the priests in approving an offering presented to God. Abraham believed the Lord even in a situation that looked hopeless. He was “in the

⁵ Brueggemann, 144.

right” with God.⁶ There was nothing Abraham did to earn this righteousness, but because he believed God he was looked upon as in a right relationship with God.⁷

Take time to explore (20 minutes)

Military life provides ample opportunity to wait for a promise to be fulfilled. What are some lessons you have learned as you wait for something important?

Join with two other people and read the following verses. What messages do these scriptures convey about God as your champion?

- Jeremiah 20:11
- Isaiah 19:20
- Isaiah 42:13
- Psalm 50:15
- Psalm 18:6
- Psalm 27:5

How do you see God acting in your life to show he is with you—even in the waiting?

Travelogue (10 minutes)

Military wife Kristin writes about being a champion for others even when she felt like she needed one for herself. What do you think? What military wives have been your champions? How did they do this for you?

“As a twenty-something who had been married for all of three months, I complained to a retiree wife that nobody was mentoring me. She asked me if I was doing that for a younger wife. I looked at her blankly until she gently but firmly pointed out that there were already younger wives in the squadron whom I could be mentoring. So, I did more mentoring than I was mentored, but how else will it happen?” In the process of being a champion for others Kristin learned much about her role as a military wife. Today, she is a sought-after mentor and friend.

Pack your bags (10 minutes)

Is there an area in your life in which you need God to be your champion? Write a brief prayer in the space below and commit that request to him.

Consider playing the song “You Are For Me” by Kari Jobe. Encourage the women to listen and reflect on the reminder that God is with them and for them.

⁶ Robert Davidson, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary: Genesis 12–50* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 44.

⁷ William Reyburn and Euan McG. Fry, *A Handbook on Genesis* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1997), 336.

A Change of Character (Week 5)

Waypoints 21–25 · Genesis 16–19

Stop and get your bearings (10 minutes)

- Begin class with prayer.
- Ask if anyone would like to share a highlight from the readings of the past week.

Where shall we go? (10 minutes)

- Turn to a partner and share anything you know about your name. Do you know why you were given the name? Do you know what your name means? How do you feel about your name?

Read the map (15 minutes)

God Knew Hagar's Name

From your reading of Genesis 16, what do you know about Hagar?

God's intervention in Hagar's situation was purposeful and deliberate. It is interesting to note that Genesis 16:8 is the only known instance in ancient Near Eastern literature where deity addresses a woman by name.⁸ What does that communicate to you?

In Genesis 16:13 Hagar says, “You are a God of seeing,” for she said, “Truly here I have seen him who looks after me.” What comfort can you glean as a military wife from this encounter between Hagar and the angel of the Lord?

God Knew Abraham's Name

What significant event takes place in the life of Abraham in Genesis 17:5?

In the ancient world a name was not merely an identity marker. A person's name contained something of the person's character, personality, and destiny. When someone received a new name it was intended to indicate or ensure that person's future.⁹ A change of name points to a significant change in someone's life. The name Abram, which means “exalted father,” was changed to Abraham, which means “father of a multitude of nations.”¹⁰ God initiated a covenant with Abraham in which he promised to give him the land that would become the home of the nation of Israel. The land was important, but the people were the focus. People who worshipped God alone would inhabit the land.¹¹ The change of name for Abraham and Sarah indicated an inner change. It also marked a shift away from the attitude displayed at the Tower of Babel, where the people tried to “make a name for ourselves.” The journey for Abraham and Sarah was not a journey to make their own names known, but to allow God to be known through them as they introduced him to other peoples on the earth.¹²

⁸ Gordon Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 16–50* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 11.

⁹ Davidson, 57.

¹⁰ Reyburn and Fry, 367.

¹¹ John E. Hartley, *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series: Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 171.

¹² Paul Borgman, *Genesis: The Story We Haven't Heard* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 60.

God Knew Sarah's Name

What made Sarah laugh in Genesis 18:12?

Sarah's laughter precedes one of the most powerful statements in Scripture: "Is anything too hard for God?" (Genesis 18:14). In this statement Sarah was not rebuked for laughing but gently reminded that God knew her name and heard her innermost thoughts and desires. He was able to bring her heart's desires to pass.¹³ Sarai, whose name meant "princess," became Sarah, "a mother of nations," as she was drawn into full ownership of the covenant promise.¹⁴

Take time to explore (15 minutes)

God Knows Your Name

Have a meeting with two other people and discuss the following: A true encounter with God Almighty changes a person. If you follow Christ now, how have you changed since becoming a Christ follower? What steps are you taking to keep your relationship with God growing strong?

Travelogue (10 minutes)

Read the paragraphs below and underline anything that resonates with you. You will have a chance to share your thoughts when everyone is finished.

The words spoken to Sarah, "Is anything too hard for God?" are not meant to be a verse we claim in order to change our circumstances. God can certainly change circumstances, but sometimes the toughest thing for us is to accept our circumstances and grow through them.¹⁵ (The term "hard" in this verse does not refer a quality that can be connected to human effort, but refers to that which goes beyond what human workmanship can attain.¹⁶)

Veteran military wife Judy encourages her military sisters to "Maximize the military experience instead of begrudging the sacrifices that come with the commitment." Sometimes the sacrifice is hard—but it comes with the promise that God knows your name. God is aware of your situation and will use the difficult circumstances for good in your life.

Pack your bags (10 minutes)

Read the verse below aloud together.

But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine" (Isaiah 43:1).

In the space below, write what it means to you for God to call you by name and tell you "you are mine."

¹³ Bill T. Arnold, *Encountering the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 102.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁵ John H. Walton, *The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 470.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 454.

A Cherished Life (Week 6)

Waypoints 26–30 · Genesis 20–25

Materials needed

- Cardstock and markers for epitaph activities

Stop and get your bearings (10 minutes)

- Begin class with prayer.
- Ask if anyone would like to share a highlight from the readings of the past week.

Where shall we go? (10 minutes)

- Imagine that after living twenty-plus years as a military wife, you have the opportunity to write the epitaph for that time period. On the paper provided, write an epitaph for yourself that says something about the kind of military wife you hope to be remembered as. Share your finished product with someone sitting close to you.
- Post the completed epitaphs and allow time for a few comments.

Read the map (10 minutes)

- Join with two other people and create a simple epitaph for Abraham and Sarah. Be ready to share your creation and explain why you chose your statement.

Take time to explore (20 minutes)

Abraham died with a strong sense that he had pleased God. There can be no greater epitaph.

Join with two different people to read the following verses and discuss the questions that follow.

- Romans 4:13
- Galatians 3:9
- Galatians 3:14
- Hebrews 11:8
- Hebrews 11:17

What theme ties these verses together?

Tests of our faith can actually serve to strengthen our faith. Can you recall a time when your faith was tested? What was the result?

How does the example of Abraham and Sarah's faith encourage you in your own journey of faith?

Travelogue (10 minutes)

This week you were asked "How satisfied are you with military life?" How did you respond?

A 2005 study by the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center reported, "Of all spouses, more than half (57 percent) are very satisfied/satisfied with the Army as a way of life and slightly less than

one-fifth (16 percent) are dissatisfied/very dissatisfied.”¹⁷ Consider the branch of service you represent. Do you find this statement accurate? Why or why not? How does your relationship with God affect your overall satisfaction with military life?

Pack your bags (10 minutes)

Abraham and Sarah became different people as they traveled with God. Sometimes faith has to go before it will grow.

Write one thing you have gleaned through this journey of faith with Abraham and Sarah that will help you on your own journey as a military wife.

¹⁷ Highlights, Survey of Army Families V 2004/2005 (Washington D.C.: US Army Community and Family Support Center, 2005), 2.