

God Builds a Nation

God will accomplish his plan and will in this world, but he often does it in ways we would not expect and through surprising people.

Introduction

Have you ever heard someone say, "The Lord works in mysterious ways." This line is not from the Bible, but from the opening line of a hymn written in the eighteenth century by William Cowper. Nonetheless, people still use it because, well, the Lord *does* work in mysterious ways. The story of the Bible contains all sorts of times that God uses surprising people:

- Who will speak for God? Moses ... a man who hated public speaking.
- Who will lead God's people to military victory? Deborah ... a woman who was not trained as a warrior.
- Who will be a disciple of Jesus? Matthew ... a tax collector and a notorious sinner.
- Who will write half the books of the New Testament? Paul ... a man who had destroyed churches and killed Christians.

You get the picture. These are just four examples from a much longer list of surprising people God called and used. All through the pages of *The Story* we read about God working through the most unlikely of people.

As we are swept into the story of Abram and Sarai we begin to believe that God can use anyone. When this truth finds its way deep into our souls, we are filled with hope because we realize that God can do great things through anyone ... including us!

Talk About It

As we read *The Story* we discover that God is full of surprises. He rarely does things the way we would expect. Tell about a time God did something in your life (or the life of someone close to you) that was totally unexpected and surprising.

DVD Teaching Notes

As you watch the video segment for session 2, use the following outline to record anything that stands out to you.

God has a plan to get his people back

God picks an unlikely pair ... Abraham and Sarah give birth to a son, Isaac

Abraham is tested ... will he give God his best?

The significance of Mount Moriah in the Old and New Testaments

DVD Discussion

1. Many of the people God called to follow him and do great things had excuses or reasons they thought God should not use them. What are some of the common excuses people still use today when they want to get out of following God's leading for their life?
2. When God called Abram to follow him, there was a clear sense of partnership. God promised to do specific things and also called Abram to do his part (Genesis 12:1–5; *The Story*, p. 13). What was God's part and what was Abram's part in this great adventure?
3. What do you learn about Abraham and Sarah's faith from Hebrews 11:8–9 (a summary of *The Story*, pp. 13–20)?

4. Tell about an older person in your life who has been a model of faith and love for God. How have you seen their life impact the lives of others and yours?

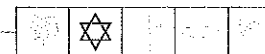
"You think you're too old, you think you have missed your chance to do something big, something significant. That's the way we think in the Lower Story. But if we align our lives to God and what he's up to, some of our best years are still ahead of us."

5. Abraham and Sarah were called by God and they followed him in faith. Tell about a time God called you to take a step of faith. How did you respond and how did that step of faith turn out?

6. Sarah did not think God was moving fast enough with the whole "nation building project." So, she decided to help God by giving her handmaid to Abraham to bear a child for her. Give some examples of ways we jump ahead of God's timing for our lives in an effort to "help" him.

Tell about a time that God said, "Wait," but you wanted to rush ahead. Why is it so hard to be patient and wait on God's will for our lives?

7. Abraham and Sarah chose to follow God by faith and trust that he would build a nation through them — and he did. What step of faith is God calling you to take now, but you are still waiting or even resisting? What can you do to take a trust-filled step and move forward in this area of your life?



8. Read movement 2 of *The Story* (p. 11 of this participant's guide). What is the big theme of this second movement?

God is in the business of surprising us by using those who are weak, broken, outcast, questionable, and ordinary to accomplish his extraordinary plans in this world.

Closing Prayer

As you take time to pray, here are some ideas to get you started:

- Pray for strength to make the next step of faith that God is calling you to take.
- Ask God to grow your patience so you can wait on his will in each area of your life.
- Thank God for the older people he has placed in your life who have been a model of faith for you.

Between Sessions

Personal Reflections

God calls each of his children, at various times, to follow him in ways that are risky and demand faith. Look at your life and reflect honestly on these scenarios:

- When was a time God called me to step out in faith, but I missed the opportunity? (Confess this to God and receive his grace to let it go.)
- When was a time God invited me to take a bold step of faith and I followed with confidence? (Thank God for carrying you through that time.)
- Ask God to give you a sense of where he might be leading you in the future. Commit to follow him, no matter what anyone else might say or think.

Personal Action

Abraham took what was most precious to him and surrendered it to God. He would not hold back even his own son. Make a list of five to ten things that mean a great deal to you. One by one, offer them to God. If it is a person, surrender that loved one to the Lord. If it is a material thing, let God know that he has full access to it. If it is a talent or ability, tell God you will use it for him. Take everything and freely offer it back to the One who gave you all you have.

Read for Next Session

Take time before your next small group to read chapter 3 of *The Story*.