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ENGAGE

[verb: in-gaj—to come together and interlock]

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Lesson 1





Where We're Going

After this lesson, participants will know the story of God's call and promise to Abram and Sarai, reflect on these biblical persons' faith in order to obey God, and consider what they themselves are willing to sacrifice in order to receive God's promises.



Get Them Going

Tell your participants that the Scriptures are filled with people who do things by faith, which means that nothing is available to confirm an expectation other than a promise from God.



Waiting For God To Choose

Clarissa brought Joy her iced tea and smirked as she put it on the table. She said something about it being too cold to drink anything iced. Both of them had been chatting before their lunch, and they picked up from their last exchange.

"Sometimes following God leaves me feeling like I'm all over the place," Joy said to Clarissa.

They had talked repeatedly about Joy's prayer. Both of them shared the dilemma with their families and asked them to pray for Joy. She needed to choose a site for her graduate internship.

The deadline was fast approaching. Joy told Clarissa two weeks ago that she was desperate to hear something from the Lord.

"You still don't have a sense of what God wants you to do about that internship?"

Joy shook her head from side to side and shrugged.

"You have to pick by next week, right?"

"Thursday."

"What will you do?"

"I'm going to hear from God," Joy said. "Or you are!"

Clarissa was shaking her hands and smiling. "Well, if God were planning to speak to me, I would think He'd have said something by now. I've been pleading with Him over this, Joy."

"I know. And I love you for it." They sipped their iced tea and hot chocolate, resigned to enjoying the drinks in front of them. Joy munched on her ice, and even though Clarissa always teased her about how loud she chewed her ice, she said nothing to Joy about it now.

After a few sips, Clarissa said. "At least you have two choices."

"That's true. Most of my classmates are waiting on just one site to call them." Joy paused and her eyes fell to her hands, which were clasped over her lap as if she were still praying. "I'm grateful, really."

"Maybe God will just be quiet."

"That's terrible, girl!"

"What?"

"Clarissa, how can you say that? My life is on hold until this comes through."

"But you have choices. Maybe God will just say nothing so you can pick," Clarissa said. "It's not like you don't trust Him."



Real Talk

1. What is Joy so unsure about?
2. What is Clarissa's advice on what to do next?
3. What does it mean to trust God?
4. How has God spoken to you in the past?



The Big Picture

This passage introduces us to Abram and Sarai, two people who God used to start the nation of Israel. They are indispensable to the overall message of the Bible, and their lives show us patterns of faith, courage, hope, and fortitude.



The Players

Abram. The significance of God's call for a nation through Abram was that up to this point, there was no distinction between people and races in the manner that we think of today. After the Flood, the people were



Make It Stick

“I will cause you to become the father of a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and I will make you a blessing to others” (Genesis 12:2, NLT).



The Word (NLT)

Genesis 12:1 Then the LORD told Abram, “Leave your country, your relatives, and your father’s house, and go to the land that I will show you.

2 I will cause you to become the father of a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and I will make you a blessing to others.

3 I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you.”

4 So Abram departed as the LORD had instructed him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.

5 He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all his wealth—his livestock and all the people who had joined his household at Haran—and finally arrived in Canaan.

6 Traveling through Canaan, they came to a place near Shechem and set up camp beside the oak at Moreh. At that time, the area was inhabited by Canaanites.

7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “I am going to give this land to your offspring.” And Abram built an altar there to commemorate the LORD’s visit.

8 After that, Abram traveled southward and set up camp in the hill country between Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar and worshiped the LORD.

9 Then Abram traveled south by stages toward the Negev.

dispersed at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9). The Bible depicts a detailed review of Shem’s descendants—Noah’s eldest son. It is out of Shem’s lineage, through Abram, that God would call out a people unto Himself to be witnesses in the earth of His greatness. They would receive the blessing for serving the one true and living God in the midst of universal idolatry. Ultimately, Abram’s seed through 42 generations would bring forth the Messiah who would reconcile the world back to the Father (Matthew 1:1–17). Abram exemplifies the faith necessary to obtain righteousness and access to the promises of God through Jesus Christ.

The Land of Canaan. The Hebrew word for “Canaan” (Kena`an, **ken-AH-an**) means low region or lowland. Its name denotes that the country resides west of the Jordan and the Dead Sea, between those waters on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Named after Noah’s fourth son Ham, the land was given by God to Abram’s posterity, the Children of Israel, as promised. In modern geography, Canaan is now Palestine.



Backstage

In the preceding chapter (Genesis 11:10–32), we learn of Abram’s lineage as a descendant of Noah’s son Shem. In Genesis 9:26, Noah prophesied over Shem, after he and his brother Japheth covered his nakedness, declaring that he would be blessed, and that Canaan would be his servant. Genesis 11 ends with Abram’s father, Terah, leading his family’s migration from his native land Ur of the Chaldees to make their way to the land of Canaan, but instead, the group settles in Haran (Genesis 11:31). It is noted in verse 32, however, that Terah remained in Haran until his death. Geographically, scholars maintain that Haran was perched between Ur and Canaan, so they were in the middle of their intended destination. Terah’s name was believed to mean “delay,” and as referenced in a review of Israel’s history (Joshua 24:2), he was an idol worshiper. We will see why Abram and Sarai’s faith and obedience were pivotal to the blessing for all nations as God separates him from his people.



Combing Through

1. God’s Call for a Blessed Nation (Genesis 12:1–3)

Abram was the youngest son of Terah. He was a descendant of Noah’s son Shem. According to Stephen’s account in Acts 7:2–4, the God of glory appeared to Abram while he was in Mesopotamia, which was before he settled in Haran. Therefore, when Abram heard God’s call in Genesis 12:1, this was his second encounter with the Lord Jehovah, and it’s believed to be not long after his father’s death. Abram was told to leave his country and his family and uproot his home to go to a place the Lord would soon reveal. The Scripture does not indicate that there was a discussion after this command was given, but that Abram moved at God’s word. Abram was surrounded by people, including his own family, who were polytheistic (worshiped multiple gods). For him to hear the voice of the true and living God was monumental. Because of his obedience, Abram is forever etched as “the father of faith.” With this second encounter, however, God made Abram a promise to bless him and make him a great nation, to make his name great and for him to be a blessing (v. 2). This promise from God was astounding due to Abram’s age (v. 4), and as first noted in Genesis 11:30, his wife Sarai was barren. God gave Abram further motivation to adhere to His command with the pronouncement of future blessings. For leaving his father’s house, Abram would receive a father’s blessing—a namesake. God gave Abram His sovereign promise to fulfill His word to make a great nation from him and to make his name great. Abram went from not having any children and with no hope of ever being a father to having the promise of an entire nation coming from his loins.

In Genesis 12:3, God established His relationship and the power of this connection by stat-

ing that He would bless those who blessed Abram and curse those who cursed him. God’s presence is marked in the lives of those chosen by Him. Verse 3 ends with the most important component of this promise: God commits to blessing all the families of the earth through Abram. Abram’s seed birthed three world religions; Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Ishmael) all lay claim to him as father. However, the ending of this verse points to the coming Christ who would bring salvation and restoration to the world. Abram’s seed is the divinely appointed channel through which blessing would come to all humankind by faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:6–7, 14).

2. Abram’s Response to God’s Call (vv. 4–6)

Abram followed God’s spoken command and departed from his familiar surroundings to a place unknown. Abram, after having departed once with his kindred from his native land of Ur, was once again a nomad at the age of 75, leaving Haran. He took with him his wife, all their possessions, his nephew Lot, and his servants. We can imagine how very unsettling it must have been for Abram to be uprooted again and to move everything he owned to answer God’s call. However, in spite of the circumstances, Abram walked in obedience and trusted God based on what God had revealed to him. He went forward and began the journey. His father, Terah, stopped short his migration to Canaan (see Genesis 11:31, NIV). When God declares a call on your life, not everyone is privy to seeing the revelation of God’s plan. Therefore, even close relatives may need to be left behind.

In Genesis 12:6, Abram arrives in Canaan and the land is already occupied by the Canaanites. He is yet again a stranger in a strange land. He was put in an uncomfortable position by coming into a land that was promised to him but was already inhabited, which could have been a reason to give

up. But Abram continued to follow God and remain confident he heard God correctly. Oftentimes, when God gives us a directive, it may not come with full disclosure of the details—like what we have to go through to get to the promise. Just like Jesus, Abram teaches us to keep moving forward by focusing on God's promise (Hebrews 12:2).

3. God's Promise of Generational Blessings (v. 7)

In this instance, rather than just speaking to Abram, God appeared in the form of a theophany—God appeared in human form. Some scholars believe this appearance was Christ in His pre-incarnate state. He showed Abram once again the land He was going to bless Abram with and reinstated His promise to give him seed or offspring. Abram yet again heard a word from the Lord declaring that he would not only receive this land that is already occupied but that his children would live in it. In response to God's appearance, Abram built an altar unto the Lord. The proper response to God's presence and confirmation of His promise is worship. Abram had God's continued assurance that he would receive that which God

had spoken, and by making a personal appearance, it further sealed the guarantee.

4. Abram's Obedience in Answering God's Call (vv. 8–9)

Abram continued to move forward at God's command and thus declared his own allegiance to serve God alone. In spite of the culture around him, which had a god for everything, Abram is the father of a monotheistic religion that is based on a relationship with the true and living God. Abram pitched his tent, and wherever he pitched his tent, he built an altar unto the Lord. He remained in constant contact with Him through worship and prayer as he called on the name of the Lord. Abram lived a disciplined life of worship and walked in obedience by listening for the voice of the Lord God. Abram's faithful response to God's promise to make him a great nation required a close relationship and strict adherence to God's instructions. Abram would have been shortsighted if he thought only of the personal impact of this promise, but because the call was greater than he could ever imagine, he was willing to make the sacrifice with his wife by his side.



Diving Deeper Quiz

Have the participants read Genesis 12:1–9, BACKSTAGE, and COMBING THROUGH from the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE. Then, have them answer the following:

1. What did God say to Abram and what didn't God say?
2. What does bless mean, and what does curse mean?
3. How do you think it felt to be a part of Abram's family when they traveled?
4. Have you experienced anything similar to Abram, Sarai, and their family?



Next Steps

As you reflect on today's lesson, what has God promised in your life that will bless you and others now as well as in generations to come? What are you willing to risk to follow through with God's plan and bring Him glory, even at the risk of your own comfort? Pray and

assess your own ambitions, goals, and interests to see if they line up with God's Word. Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you about anything that needs adjustment.



Put It Out There

A. Group Application

Reading the story of Abram and Sarai inspires faith. We see them leaving when they don't know where they're headed. They have instructions but no destination. When you address your class, point out that the world needs followers of Jesus who do what Abram and Sarai did.

When we answer God's call with obedience—even when obedience means simply “traveling south”—we are a witness to the world that living for God is exciting, dangerous, and life-giving.

B. Personal Application

Abram and Sarai offer us a challenge and a hope. The challenge, which goes deep in our hearts, is to obey God personally and regularly. We must answer God as Abram and Sarai did with their families and belongings. The hope they had was a trust in God, a trust that God would continue to speak, answer, and illuminate the path. Invite your class to appeal to God's Spirit for that trust.



Wrap It Up

A. Daily Bible Readings

Day 1: Genesis 1–3
Day 2: Genesis 4–7
Day 3: Genesis 8–11

Day 4: Genesis 12–15

Day 5: Genesis 16–18

Day 6: Genesis 19–21

Day 7: Genesis 22–24

B. Talk to Him

Lord, help me to trust you even when I am uncertain where you are leading me.



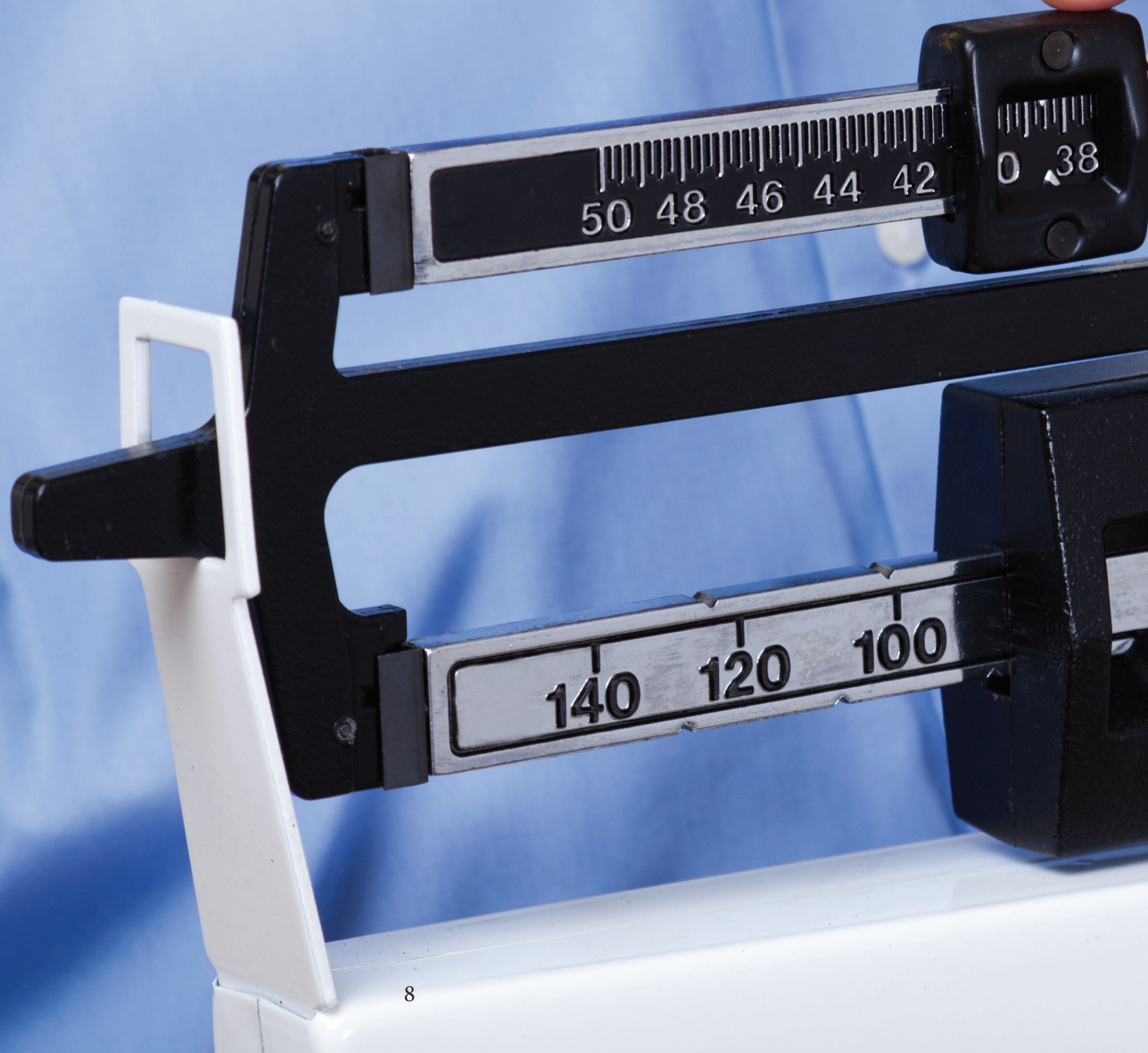
Say Word?

Canaan. KAY-nuhn

SWAG
(Spiritual Wisdom and Guidance)

You can never go home again, but the truth is you can never leave home, so it's all right.—Maya Angelou

Lesson 2





Where We're Going

By the end of this lesson, participants will learn how to explore the divine manifestations and warnings that accompanied the giving of the Ten Commandments, aspire to live in more perfect obedience to God's laws, and share ways to show God they are serious about obeying His laws.



Get Them Going

Ask participants how many of them like to drive fast. Why do they enjoy it? Explain that speeding, especially on the streets and freeways, isn't only dangerous but is usually breaking the law. Still, we do it. Why? What are the consequences of being caught? What occurs after being pulled over? Knowing the consequences, why are some people still willing to take the risk?



Stuffed!

Kenton loved food, but his absolute favorite food of all time was pizza. He loved any style: thin crust, deep dish, New York style, or flatbread. Kenton's first experience was early in his childhood at the birthday party of his daycare buddy, Maxwell. His mom passed out this thick-crust pie slice draped with cheese and tomato sauce. "You'll enjoy this," she stated.

He took the plate with the mystery food on it, although he wasn't really certain what it was. "It's just pizza," his friend Maxwell said. "Okay," he replied. Kenton had never had this type of pizza before. He was accustomed to the thin, frozen kind. He decided to dive in but took his first bite slowly, just in case he didn't like it.

It was love at first bite!

As an adult, Kenton would treat himself to his favorite pizza every Friday. It was his personal reward after making it through the workweek. He preferred the all-meat deep dish style from the pizzeria down the block from his house. They knew him by name. "Hey, K!" they would announce when he came in to pick up the pizza pie. "Hey, Mike! You got me ready?" he would respond. Mike slid the large box over so Kenton could inspect it himself. After examining the box's contents, "Yup," Kenton would respond. He'd pay, grab his meal, and say, "See you next week!"

As Kenton left the pizzeria, he received a text message from his doctor's office. It was a reminder of his appointment Monday. He dreaded this appointment because he knew the doctor would tell him he needed to lose weight. Over the years, Kenton's weight had become a problem. At his previous appointment, the doctor informed him to smarten up on his meal selections. Although pizza was delicious, it was also high in calories, especially his favorite deep-dish pizza. Kenton decided he didn't want to worry about it then. It was pizza time!

Walking into the doctor's office, Kenton felt his anxiety level rising. "Kenton, please step onto the scale," the nurse said. After writing down his weight, she said, "The doctor would be in shortly." As the doctor entered, Kenton readied himself for bad news. "Well Kenton, I wish I had better news for you. However, I must be honest with you. We are at the point where we must take some serious precautions. Dietary boundaries must be set."



Real Talk

1. Why is Kenton's pizza obsession unhealthy?
2. What does it mean to live with boundaries and rules according to God's will?
3. Why are some things permissible to do, but still should not be done?
4. Do you think people should have a healthy fear of God?



The Big Picture

In today's passage, God commands Moses to instruct the Israelites about consecration. He reiterates that images of false gods should never be constructed, but instead, to make an altar for Him. This is the altar where sacrifices could be given. This is the altar where God's name would be lifted, and as a result, He would be able to come and bestow blessings upon them.



Make It Stick

“Build my altar whenever I cause my name to be remembered, and I will come to you and bless you” (from Exodus 20:24, NLT).



The Word (NLT)

Exodus 20:18 When the people heard the thunder and the loud blast of the ram’s horn, and when they saw the flashes of lightning and the smoke billowing from the mountain, they stood at a distance, trembling with fear.

19 And they said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen. But don’t let God speak directly to us, or we will die!”

20 “Don’t be afraid,” Moses answered them, “for God has come in this way to test you, and so that your fear of him will keep you from sinning!”

21 As the people stood in the distance, Moses approached the dark cloud where God was.

22 And the LORD said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: You saw for yourselves that I spoke to you from heaven.

23 Remember, you must not make any idols of silver or gold to rival me.

24 Build for me an altar made of earth, and offer your sacrifices to me—your burnt offerings and peace offerings, your sheep and goats, and your cattle. Build my altar whenever I cause my name to be remembered, and I will come to you and bless you.

25 If you use stones to build my altar, use only natural, uncut stones. Do not shape the stones with a tool, for that would make the altar unfit for holy use.

26 And do not approach my altar by going up steps. If you do, someone might look up under your clothing and see your nakedness.”



The Players

Moses. Moses plays a prominent role in the events of this passage. Born a Hebrew slave, Moses was later raised in the home of the Pharaoh, God chose Moses to return to Egypt and lead the Hebrew people out of slavery. In the process, God shaped and molded Moses into His faithful servant who became an outstanding leader of His people.

Mount Sinai. The events of this passage take place at Mount Sinai, often referred to as “the mountain of God.” It is believed by some to be located about fifty miles north of the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula, in an area now controlled by Egypt. On this mountain, Moses met God in the burning bush, and here God called Moses to go to Egypt and lead His people out of slavery (Exodus 3). Many years later, the prophet Elijah would return to this mountain (which is also called Horeb) and hear from God in the gentle whisper of a still, small voice (1 Kings 19:8–13).

How would you evaluate Moses’ relationship with God? Did God direct Moses’ life in ways that helped Moses mature and become the leader that He needed?



Backstage

The events of this Scripture take place in the third month after God had led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. For nearly three months, a vast multitude of men, women, and children had been slowly moving across formidable deserts. All the miraculous events that God had ordained in Egypt, including the night of the Passover and the parting of the Red Sea, were certainly still fresh in their minds. In the past few months, they had seen the presence of God in the pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day. They had been miraculously fed by the manna and quail. God had provided water when none was to be found. The Israelites were constantly aware of the presence and power of God in their midst. Now they were camped at the foot of Mount Sinai, where God would once again show His mighty power and give the Law to His people through their leader Moses. Through the process, the people would learn more about God and what He expected of them.

How would you evaluate the importance of the Ten Commandments in the lives of the Israelites, as well as all modern-day believers?



Combing Through

1. God Makes His Presence Known (Exodus 20:18)

For three months, God had made His presence known through miraculous physical phenomena such as the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. He led them to stop at Mount Sinai, where He would give His people the Law.

The Israelites’ stopping at Mount Sinai mirrors what happens in a believer’s life. We worship the Lord and come to know who He is before we are given commands to obey. The Law outlined how they were expected to live as His people in relationship with Him and in relationship with each other. They were expected to fulfill these covenant requirements. This is in line with the commands that Jesus put forth as the first and second greatest commandments for us—to love God and to love people.

It was important for God to make sure His people knew that it was He, Almighty God, the God of their fathers, who was giving the Law. So He used spectacular divine manifestations to cause them to respond in fear and reverence to keep their covenant commitment. He used smoke, thunder, the sound of heavenly trumpets, and lightning. God’s manifestation of His presence had the desired effect. The presence of God and the recognized authorship of His commands also cause us to reverence God, receive His words, and obey them.

What has caused you to fear and revere God lately?

2. The People Show Reverent Fear (vv. 19–21)

The people withdrew in fear, knowing they were truly in the presence of Almighty God. Yet Moses told them, “Fear not, for God is come to prove you” (v. 20). What Moses was telling them was that they should not withdraw from God in terror; God intended to use this experience to instill in them a reverent awe of Him. It was as if God were saying, “I want you to know I really mean business here!” Thus, “fear of the LORD” would prompt His people to want to keep the Law, and never sin. God also used the divine manifestations to underscore the importance of

His commands that He would be their only God and they were never to make any idols. After all they had seen, heard, and experienced, it is hard to imagine that any of the Israelites would ever consider following any other god! They had heard His voice and seen His power, yet they had not seen Him in any physical shape or form. But God knows the fragility of human nature, and no matter how many times they experienced God's miracles and presence, they turned to idols. It is the same way with us. We often forget who God is and turn to less-than-satisfactory idols.

What motivates you to modify your behavior and respond to God in obedience?

3. God Encourages Worship (vv. 22–26)

Finally, God gave instructions on the building of altars to be used

in worship. While this command seems unusual to us, it was fitting for the culture of the time. From the beginning, God has always desired worship, and at that time worship included sacrifices and burnt offerings. What God wanted to make clear with the commands of verses 24–26 was that the altars were to be temporary and portable. They were not yet in the Promised Land, and their focus was to be on the object of their worship rather than the place of their sacrifice. The stones were to be unhewn, perhaps so no one would be tempted to carve the stones into some image or idol. And the altars were not to have steps leading up to them so their sacrifices would be made in humility and modesty. Again, the focus was then, and is now, on the object of our worship, not on the means, place, or structure.

How and where can we create opportunities to worship God in addition to Saturday and Sunday worship services?



Diving Deeper Quiz

Have the participants read Exodus 20:18–26, BACKSTAGE, and COMBING THROUGH from the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE. Then, have them answer the following:

1. Why do you think the people trembled with fear and stayed at a distance (Exodus 20:18–19)?
2. Although Moses told them not to fear, why did the people continue to keep their distance (vv. 20–21)?
3. Why does God not want them to make silver or gold images (v. 23)?
4. Where and why would God honor the people (v. 24)?



Next Steps

God's greatness and awesomeness compel us to honor our commitment to Him. Here are some ways we can remember to honor Him and what He has done in our lives:

- Go outdoors and look up at the sky to remind yourself of the greatness of God.

- Bring a special offering in thanksgiving to God.
- Spend time each morning reading God's Word and writing down a Bible verse on a card to take with you.



Put It Out There

A. Group Application

Ask the students to share their thoughts on why we must live with rules and boundaries in our everyday life. What are the consequences of not living according to God's will?

B. Personal Application

Encourage your class to reflect on what they are afraid of in life. Is God at the top of the list? Learn how to live in God's will and have a healthy fear of Him.



Wrap It Up

A. Daily Bible Readings

Day 8: Genesis 25–26
Day 9: Genesis 27–29
Day 10: Genesis 30–31
Day 11: Genesis 32–34

Day 12: Genesis 35–37

Day 13: Genesis 38–40

Day 14: Genesis 41–42

B. Talk to Him

Lord, teach us to live within the boundaries of Your will for us. We know You have our best interest at heart, and we trust and respect Your voice.



Say Word?

Israelite. IS-rail-ite.


SWAG
(Spiritual Wisdom and Guidance)

“There will be no peace in the soul until it is willing to obey God.”—D.L. Moody

Marriage Be Hard

Marriage Be Hard, but people be fake about it. Kevin and Melissa Fredericks aka KevOnStage and MrsKevOnStage keep it real about married life in their new book *Marriage Be Hard*.

KevOnStage x MrsKevOnStage
x Urban Faith



*The following article consists of excerpts from an interview with Kevin and Melissa Fredericks about their book **Marriage Be Hard**. The article has been edited for length and clarity. The full interview can be watched on urbanfaith.com and the UrbanFaith YouTube channel. The book **Marriage Be Hard** is available everywhere.*

Maina

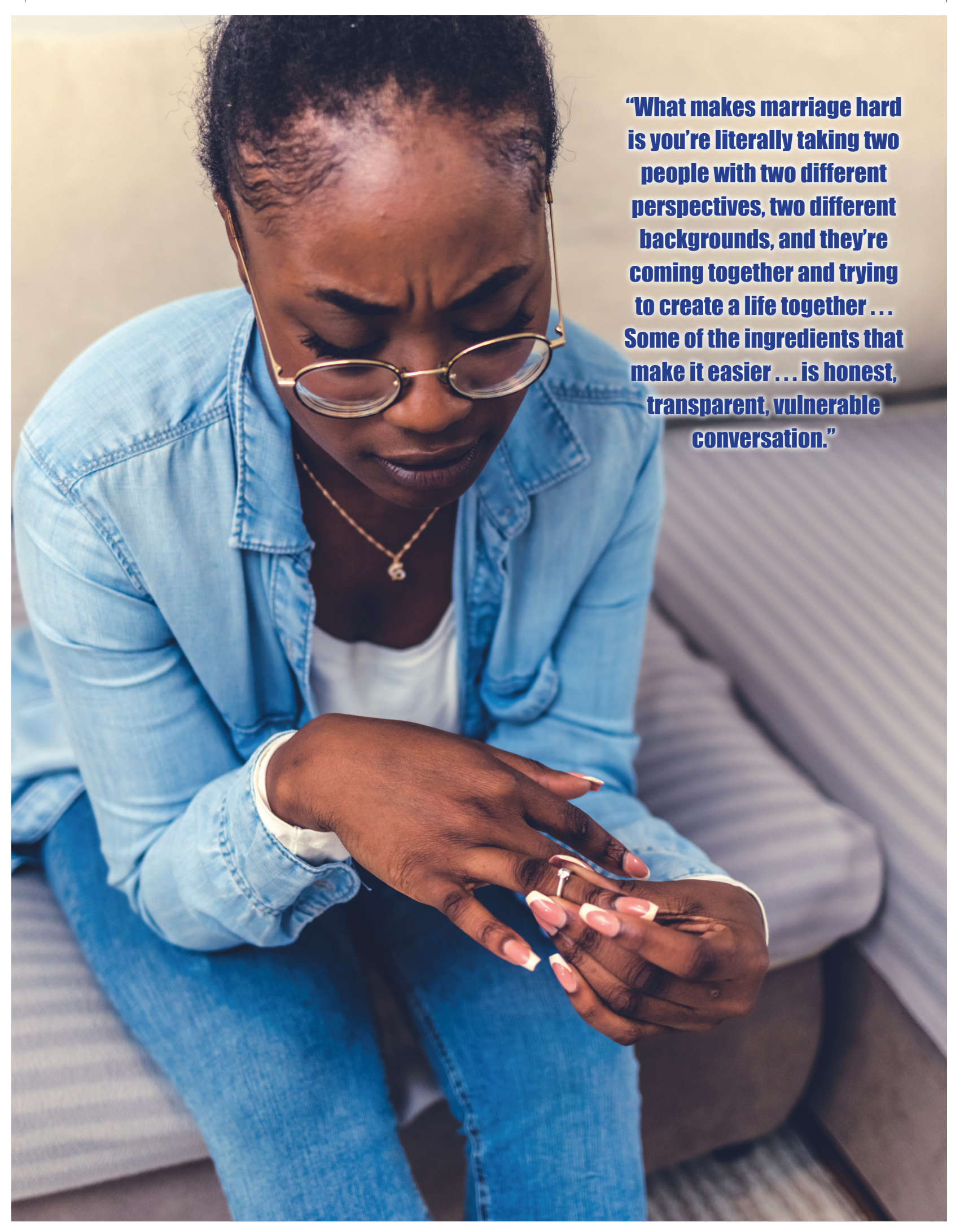
Why did you decide to be so authentic [when writing this book]? You didn't have to be.

Kevin

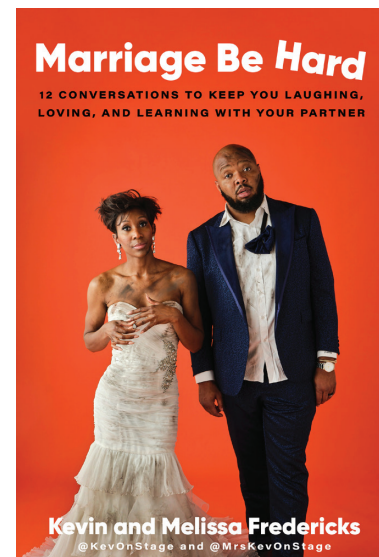
I mean, it's the reason we wrote this book. We wrote this book because it's the book we wish we had. Melissa and I grew up very churchy, the majority of our memories of life are church. Our memories are in the church. And when we got married, you know, we were struggling with our marriage. And in church, and I say "in church" because that's where we spent most of our time, we feel like everybody else [is fine]. Everybody else's marriage don't seem to be having no problems. We [were] looking around like, "Man, is it only us? What's going on here?" And then, lo and behold, I'm seeing people who never had an issue. Marriage is perfect [to us]. Then they're getting divorced. So, we're like, wait a second, the last three years, you told us everything was perfect every time and nothing but testimonies and all this good stuff. And now you went from that to divorce? What happened in the interim? And we found out people weren't always sharing exactly how marriage is hard. They were just sharing the high points. So, we decided to write the book that we wish we had to read. And we want other people to have access to it. It's the practical part of marriage, right? For us marriage was like, here's the ingredients to bake a cake. Here's an oven. No recipe, no amounts, no nothing. So we're like, okay, I've seen an egg before, I've seen salt, I'm familiar with an oven. How do I take this and make a pound cake? Our book is that recipe, here's how you take these things. You have to break some eggs, which is hard. You have to do this and that and the oven is gonna be hot for a little while. But at the end, you're gonna have this beautiful piece. Our book is the recipe.

Maina

How have you both been able to navigate the waters of [coming from two different backgrounds]? I think in every marriage, people come from different backgrounds, different cultures. And sometimes it just doesn't work out the way we think it should. How have you guys made it work?

A woman with dark skin and curly hair pulled back, wearing gold-rimmed glasses and a light blue denim jacket over a white top. She is looking down at her hands, which are resting on her lap. Her left hand has a ring on the ring finger, and her nails are painted a light pink. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

“What makes marriage hard is you’re literally taking two people with two different perspectives, two different backgrounds, and they’re coming together and trying to create a life together . . . Some of the ingredients that make it easier . . . is honest, transparent, vulnerable conversation.”



Marriage Be Hard: 12 Conversations to Keep You Laughing, Loving, and Learning with Your Partner
by Kevin & Melissa Fredericks

Melissa

Yeah, I think that's the essence of what makes marriage hard, you're literally taking two people with two different perspectives, two different backgrounds, and they're coming together and trying to create a life together. And that is what makes it hard. Some of the ingredients that make it easier, and I talk about it in the book is honest, transparent, vulnerable conversation. But that's also really hard. Oftentimes, it's hard because we weren't taught that. We often are taught from our parents, not that they've like physically told us, but you do what you've seen. So, you've seen your parents. And when they talk, it's often harder emotions that they lead with. You hear them fussing and yelling at each other. Instead of leading with I missed you. I wanted you next to me. So what you hear is: "All you do is leave the house, you don't care about us!" Instead of saying "It really hurt my feelings. And I really just wanted to spend some quality time with you. Because I haven't seen you because you've been on the road." No one says that. And if you lead with those emotions, walls come down, you're less likely to be met with defense, you're less likely to be met with excuses. And instead, when you're met with this [angry] energy, guess what, you're gonna get back that same energy. And now we're arguing about how you're yelling at me, instead of the reality, which started off as something really sweet. "I just missed you and want to spend some time with you."

Maina

When you guys look back from [your moves] from El Paso to Maryland to LA, those are some huge steps of faith. And, I'd say you're pretty successful. What do you think when you look back to where you're at now?

Kevin

I would cite the songwriter who said I thought I told you that we won't stop, I thought I told you that we won't stop. Moving to LA [was a big leap.] Moving wasn't really hard for us ... because we're both military. Our parents moved around basically every

three to four years but they moved and their job was there when they moved to that place. And their house was there, so that's different than what we did. I think we took a calculated risk, and we did it together, that's a key [difference] as well. I wanted to move, I wanted my family to come with me, [and] I presented a plan to my wife on what that looked like. We work together to make that plan a reality. I think that's a key part about why our move worked is because she didn't have the ability to be like "I told you so" if something went wrong. Because this is a plan we agreed on and that we agreed [on doing] together. But now almost 10 years later, it's like, "Oh, snap that really worked out for us. Our children are living a life that wouldn't have been possible in Washington." We're living a life that I always dreamed of. But in some ways, things that have happened and things that God has blessed us with weren't even in my dream. You know, the Bible says, "Now unto him who was able to do exceedingly, abundantly above all we could ever ask or think!" He helped me dream my dreams and realize those. And He even gave me some I never even dreamed of. So now I got to dream new dreams and He's gonna do more than that!

Maina

Where does the creativity come from? I love watching all your stuff.

Kevin

I mean, I believe creativity comes from the Creator. I mean, the first creator was God, He created the heavens, earth, people, all that stuff. And we are His children. So I believe everyone is creative in their own way. I think it's just finding what you're good at, what you create, and how to maximize it. But I think it's a God-given gift. I think everybody's talented. Everybody's creative. Everybody can express themselves in a way that's unique to them. I think some people just tap into it and use it more than others.