

Lesson Plans that Work

Faith Practice and Climate Justice

Lesson Plans for Young Adults: Lesson Three

Theme: God calls me forward into the unknown.

Background: Climate change is an unintentional consequence of the industrial revolution. At that time, people started developing machines and processes that depended on fossil fuels extracted from the earth. This began long enough ago that our entire society now depends on fossil fuels. It can feel impossible to imagine a world without that dependency. It can feel like leaving behind everything we have ever known, without having any idea where we are going. Fortunately, our faith tradition equips and calls us to do just this. Today we reflect on the story of Abram, a spiritual ancestor whose story can give us strength.

Supplies Needed: You will need a prayer table, a candle, a prayerbook, and Bibles for each participant. If you have an image of a road or path with a curve in it easily available, add that too. If you are gathering in person, you will need pieces of paper and writing instruments for each person. If you are gathering a young adult group for the first time, and meeting in person, get blank nametags for people to fill out with name and pronouns.

Before: Prepare your prayer table. Open the prayerbook to p. 832 “Of Self-Dedication” and place it on the table open to this page. Put out the paper and writing instruments and pull up the short video to show online.

Beginning: Gather around the prayer table. Begin with any opening routine your group usually uses. If you are a new group, start with the basics: welcome new people, assure people that this is a safe space to be honest and also to pass if you aren't comfortable speaking, tell them that you expect a variety of backgrounds and experiences and we're here to learn with and from each other. If anyone is new, make sure people know where the bathrooms are. Invite people to re-introduce themselves (name, pronouns) and share highs and lows from the past week. Ask if any of them have ever moved somewhere completely new before. Did they completely know where they were going or how it would turn out?

Opening Prayer: Light your candle, pick up the prayerbook, and pray:

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated unto you; and then use us, we pray you, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Tell the story: If you have not yet, or if some people are new, share the “Note on Scripture” in the curriculum overview. Also, share the background above. Then invite everyone to open their Bibles to Genesis 12.

Ask someone to read aloud Genesis 12:1. Summarize the story so far:

- This is the first time we hear of Abram. We don't know about him before this moment.
- Abram hears God call him to leave behind everything: his country, his family, his home.
- God doesn't give Abram a specific destination. He just says "I will show you."

Ask someone to read aloud Genesis 12:2-3. Summarize the story so far:

- God promises to make Abram (one person) into a nation (many people).
- God promises to make Abram's name great, so others consider him a blessing.
- God promises to bless those who bless him, curse those who curse him, and bless the world through him.

Ask someone to read aloud Genesis 4a. Summarize the story and what it teaches:

- Abram says "yes" to this call, leaving behind what he knows without knowing where he is going.
- The "yes" from Abram is echoed in the "yes" from others in the Bible: Moses who says "yes" to God's call to lead Israel out of slavery; Mary who says "yes" to bearing Christ.
- Saying "yes" to God's will means not knowing the specifics, but trusting and practicing.
- When we follow this path, we can be fruitful; we can bless future generations.

This matters for climate justice because our ancestors left us a way of life that is unsustainable. Many of our life patterns have been shaped by the industrial revolution and legacies of injustice. For the health of future generations, God is calling us to a place we don't yet know: We are called to say "yes" to seeking life patterns that are currently unknown and unfamiliar. We don't exactly know where we are going, but we set out on the journey anyway, to become a blessing to the generations coming after us.

Reflection Activity: Invite everyone to take a piece of paper or a Google Doc, and remember a time when they left behind one chapter of life to begin another. (If this is not part of their own story, they can reflect a movie or book that they like that contains that story.)

Ask them to take five minutes to write down the emotions at the beginning, middle, and end of that process. Then, share out. What similarities are there to people's individual journeys related to the climate crisis and their own life changes? What similarities are there to our society's journey? To what degree have we heard the call to make change? To what extent are we heeding the call? What are the hard parts, and what would help?

Watch this short BBC video about churches and climate, including the quote "It becomes ever clearer that climate change is the greatest challenge that we and future generations face" -

Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev. Justin Welby (2:59)

<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/science-environment-56001191>

Gather/Ending: Summarize what Scripture teaches: We are descended from someone bold enough to begin again, trusting God to turn him into a blessing for everybody. He didn't know how it would turn out when he began. We can borrow his courage as we work to heal Creation. Ask people to share a sentence or two about what stood out to each of them today.

Prayer: To close, pray for all those gathered, and offer the Prayer for Self-Dedication again.

As people depart, you can invite participants to bring a friend to the next session, if you think that can work for your group.

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