

VIVA!



INHERITANCE

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INHERITANCE

NAMELESS

HOW TO USE

We wrote this curriculum for those times when life is busy and you might be looking for a little help and inspiration as you plan for time with your students. Everything you need to know for each week's curriculum is laid out below. That being said, the best results will come from spending some time with the curriculum in advance—make sure, in particular, to read the “Teacher Prep” section.

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WHO WROTE THIS

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OBJECTIVE

What does it mean to *inherit* the kingdom of God? And how does inheritance work, anyway? In our current culture, we're relatively removed from the older concepts of inheritance and birthright that dictate the movement of power and occasional wealth in scripture. Also common in the culture of our scripture is the tendency toward exclusion of women, a trend that still has hurdles to overcome today.

In this Viva! Series, your youth will have an opportunity to unpack some of the challenges to *inheritance* that women in our scripture faced, through the eyes of four lesser-explored female characters. Our first session will focus on Noah's wife, who we know only as... Noah's wife. She's on hand for one of the most climactic events recorded in the Bible, yet history fails to give us her name.

ACTIVITY

What You'll Need

Name tags, markers

Start by having your group make name tags for themselves. Yes, even if everybody knows everybody. It's a visual aid for later.

Invite your group to invent a new game. The only guidelines are that it must be playable in your current space and only utilize items that are in the room.

Before they get going, remind them of some of the key elements of any enjoyable game:

- **An objective.** Games are more fun when you can win them.
- **Rules.** If it's unclear how to proceed toward victory, your game sucks.
- **A challenge.** This is somewhat covered by the objective and the rules, but if they begin their process with determining the challenge, the other two will more naturally develop.
- **A name.** Every good game has a name, right?

They are obviously free (and encouraged) to make the challenge as creative as possible. It can be physical or mental—not every game needs to be full contact. Don't let this eat up all of your time together; keep the process moving.

When they're done, play the game once. If time allows at the end, they can revisit the rules to make any necessary changes.

DISCUSSION

Point of order: given the state of biblical literacy at the moment, you may have teenagers in your group that aren't familiar with the flood account from Genesis. Review the story yourself in Genesis 6:1-9:17 if needed and provide a summary before proceeding.

Ask your group: “For \$100, who can tell me the actual name of Noah’s wife as found in Genesis?” You’ll be safe, obviously. Even if someone correctly guesses that her name isn’t there, “no name” isn’t an actual name. Strategy. Don’t immediately reveal that her name isn’t present. If someone guesses it’s not there, defer with, “Sorry, we’re looking for a name.” Before the guessing game gets old, proceed by explaining that as a group you’ll just have to investigate.

Have a volunteer read Genesis 6:18. After they’ve read, say: “No name here! Probably an oversight. God is just talking to Noah here, so maybe it would have been awkward to work in everybody’s names. Someone read Genesis 7:6-7.”

Nothing there either! Ask: “What do you think is going on here? Is this on purpose?” Give it another try. Have another volunteer read Genesis 7:12-14.

That was intentional! The writer names all of the dudes and none of the women. Show it one more time; read Genesis 8:14-18. Talk about what’s going on with these words or your own:

The next few weeks we’ll be spending a lot of time talking about *inheritance*. Inheritance most often comes up when somebody dies; the family gathers, and at some point the belongings of the deceased are distributed as he or she intended. In general though, inheritance refers to anything that is passed along from person to person. Typically this happens down from one generation to the next, but it could happen from friend to friend—often with the words, “Don’t ever sell it!”

The stories of scripture are a kind of inheritance. They’ve been passed down through centuries upon centuries. In fact, they outdate the word *century*. (And *inheritance*, for that matter.) Our understanding of God and grace is a spiritual inheritance. To really dig in to our inheritance, though, we need to feel like we’re part of the story.

RESPONSE

What do you make of the absence of Noah’s wife’s name? She was adjacent to one of the most-shared stories in history, but somehow didn’t rate being named. Why would that be OK with everybody as they passed that story down?

We’re all wearing nametags. How would you feel if as people share stories about today’s gathering, they referred to you as “the person sitting next to (insert name from your group)”?

When have you felt nameless?

When do you most feel part of your own story?

What parts of your faith do you most easily recognize as *inherited*? What sources provided those things to you?

In solidarity with “Mrs. Noah” (as too many Google search results refer to her) we’re going to un-name our game. From now on, whenever we play it or someone asks to play it, we’ll just call it, “The Game that Shall not be Named.” Cool?

Wrap up your time together in prayer, thanking God for the gift and challenge of our spiritual inheritance.

VIVA!



INHERITANCE

CUT OFF

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OBJECTIVE

It's less common today, but in biblical times inheritance was deeply tied to personal security. Any claim on inheritance meant eventual money or land or goods—all things that promised sustainability of life. In the instances in the Bible where we see someone cut off from an inheritance, personal devastation is usually the intended or natural result.

In this Viva! Series, your youth will have an opportunity to unpack some of the challenges to *inheritance* that women in our scripture faced, through the eyes of four lesser-explored female characters. This session focuses on Hagar, a slave to Sarah, the wife of Abraham.

ACTIVITY

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Card stock paper, regular paper, markers or crayons, Bibles

Here's the situation:

A beloved older member of your church has regrettably passed away.

On the bright side, they were completely loaded and loved your youth group. So much so that they left a whopping \$1.2 billion dollars to the group! Awesome, right? But it gets better. Not to the program—they left it to the *members* of your youth group! Let's get the word out.

Pass out the card stock paper and markers. Do the math on your group—how much of the \$1.2 billion will each of your youth be receiving? Instruct the group to make a greeting card that announces the good news: “Our group has been given \$1.2 billion dollars to divide evenly. Each of us will be receiving \$____ to spend however we like! Isn't that great?” or something to that effect. They shouldn't put a name on the card, but each card should make it clear that the individual receiving it is a beneficiary of the will.

While they're working, *you* need to make a similar card—with one exception. At the end of your card's announcement, add the words, “Except for you.”

When they've finished creating their cards, take them all up and mix yours in with them. Pass them back out. Avoid giving anyone the card they created. Allow a moment for the realization to set in for whoever got your card.

Ask them:

Hard to imagine, but imagine this was real. What would you do with all of that money? What kind of fights can you imagine happening over what qualifies someone as a member of our group?

Probably harder to imagine, but imagine this was real and you *really* got that card cutting you out of the deal. And no one makes nice by sharing theirs with you. What does that feel like?

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Divide your group into two smaller groups. One group will read Genesis 16. The other will read Genesis 21:1-21. First, give them a little background: “Abraham was a really important guy. Three world religions trace their roots to him! Judaism, Islam, and Christianity all look to Abraham as part of their heritage. So how did that happen?”

In our Bible, God promises Abraham that his descendants will be too many to count. Abraham is pretty old and points out that he doesn’t have any kids of his own. What to do?”

Send the groups into their assigned verses. Have them work together (and write down) two things about each character: What did they do, and what could they have done instead?

A few things to bear in mind when you come back together to discuss what they come up with:

Abraham was absolutely in charge. Last week we talked about the male-dominated culture we encounter in scripture. He could have done whatever he wanted and everybody else would have just dealt with it.

It was Sarah’s idea to involve Hagar.

Hagar was a slave and didn’t really have any say in much of anything.

OK, time to dig in. “What did you come up with?” Filter their responses through the info above. After some discussion, ask:

How would having Abraham’s baby change Hagar’s status in terms of being part of the family—and by extension, being included in Ishmael’s eventual inheritance?

What was Sarah afraid of?

Abraham goes along with Sarah’s wishes, but what concerns would he have as a father here?

One other cool thing here. Biblical scholars tell us that these two stories are considered parallel texts—two accounts of the same story, written by different authors. What *differences* does your group see between the two versions of Hagar’s ousting?

RESPONSE

What comparisons can you draw between Hagar’s story and the cards we made at the beginning of our time?

When have you gotten super excited about something that ultimately didn’t come true?

When have you felt outcast?

How did Hagar eventually find grace? Where have you seen grace working in your own life?

This week, spend some time reflecting on the good news that through Christ we are assured we will never be cut

off from God's grace.

As you close, read Romans 8:38-39 and wrap up your time together in prayer.

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INHERITANCE

SECOND BEST

HOW TO USE

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OBJECTIVE

Last week we explored a fairly unusual marriage situation and this week is no different! In order to maintain security for their future, many women in scripture were forced to endure sometimes terrible and sometimes just bizarre behavior from men. Another major cultural difference we find in the Bible is in the practice of marriage itself—particularly the *number* of spouses a man might have.

In this Viva! Series, your youth will have an opportunity to unpack some of the challenges to *inheritance* that women in our scripture faced, through the eyes of four lesser-explored female characters. This session focuses on Leah and her perpetual role in second place.

ACTIVITY

In addition to inheritance, deceit, and mind-blowing family dynamics, today's session revolves around preferences. Spend a few minutes getting your group to place these sets of 3 things in order of desirability. Ideally you'll let them debate until the order of preference is unanimous, but don't let your time together die here.

Ranked from 1 to 3, with one being best:

- Pizza, video games, and playing outside
- Oceans, rivers, and lakes
- Summer, fall, winter, and spring (We know; that's 4. Get over it.)
- Love, laughter, and hope

If you've got time, let the group generate a few sets for everyone to process.

Now, a twist. In their heads—super-definitely *not out loud*—tell them to think of three close friends. Got 'em? Without speaking, put them in order.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Bibles for everyone, a working knowledge of Jacob's story from Genesis 29-30, poster board, and markers

DISCUSSION

Before diving into our content, **ask them:**

How did that feel, ranking your friends? Were you able to do it? *Without names*, how did you decide that order? Give a little background to get your group up to speed on what they're about to read:

Last week we talked about Hagar, a slave in the household of Abraham. Abraham's first son was Ishmael, born to Hagar. His second son was Isaac, born to Sarah, Abraham's wife. Isaac, when he was old, sent his own son Jacob to family in a different territory to find a wife.

Read Genesis 29:15-30. What does your group find most startling here? Focus on Leah. What would she be feeling through this? How would they feel if they knew that they were loved less than another sibling or friend?

So we've established that Leah is unloved. On the poster board, have someone write across the top "ZILPAH," "LEAH," "BILHAH," and "RACHEL." Have the group take turns a few verses at a time reading Genesis 29:31-30:24. As they read, let one youth write the names of the kids underneath the name of the mom that had them. When they've finished, go ahead and add "Benjamin" under Rachel's name. He was born a few chapters later—Rachel died delivering him. Sad face.

We've talked over the last couple of weeks about the importance of inheritance and how bearing children gave women more certain stability for the future. Beyond that stability, the ability to bear children typically brought honor to a woman, and shame to a woman who couldn't. By that math, how would your group explain Jacob's attitude toward Leah? Or to Rachel?

The favoritism even extended to the children. Joseph and Benjamin were Jacob's obvious favorites, because they were Rachel's. The animosity between the brothers was so strong that the other 10 brothers eventually sold Joseph into slavery—as a plan B for their intention to *kill* him.

RESPONSE

When have you seen favoritism cause harm?

Would anyone be willing to share about a time when you felt put in second place?

How does Leah find solace in her story?

If you could "fix this," how would you go about it? How would you rewrite their story?

Read Galatians 3:26-29. What does this tell us about the things we might ordinarily try to rank ourselves by?

What does this promise we inherit?

As you wrap up, let your group voice any concerns they have for the coming week before praying for them.

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INHERITANCE

REDEEMED

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OBJECTIVE

To repair; to restore. To atone for. To buy, get, or win back. To change for the better. To extricate, release, or free. To *redeem*. Our entire Christian narrative is framed on grace and redemption. But how do we get there?

In this Viva! Series, your youth have an opportunity to unpack some of the challenges to *inheritance* that women in our scripture faced, through the eyes of four lesser-explored female characters. This final session focuses on Naomi and her unusual journey to redemption.

ACTIVITY

The story of Naomi as recorded in the book of Ruth is one of restoration and redemption. To illustrate that, have your group bring back to life some kind of discarded item. You'll want to provide paint and brushes, cleaning supplies, and something to protect whatever space you're in from the mess that often occurs when working on this kind of project with youth.

What they restore is totally up to you. It could be a picture frame, an old piece of furniture, or whatever. If you want to get really creative you could have them work on an old bicycle or something where you happen to have some experience or knowledge—just remember to adjust your materials list to correspond to your chosen project.

If at all possible, whatever you bring in should be of no apparent value! A dirty, cobwebby mess that emerges from your time together with a fresh coat of paint will leave a strong mental image for your group to associate with the story of Naomi.

Be aware that this sort of thing can take time! Plan to either run a little long or perhaps finish another time.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Bibles for everyone, familiarity with the book of Ruth, an object to be restored, related supplies—suggested are paint, brushes, cleaning products, and table/floor protection

DISCUSSION

Ask them: How did it feel to bring an old, discarded object back to life?

When have you felt old and discarded? Where does your sense of personal worth come from?

Today we're looking at Naomi in the book of Ruth. There's a lot going on in this little book, so we're going to take it in bite-size chunks and process it as we go. Have a volunteer read Ruth 1:1-5.

Some straight comprehension: Why did Elimelech and Naomi leave Bethlehem in the first place? As a visual aid, have someone chart the family tree revealed here—Elimelech and Naomi; below them, Mahlon and Chilion; on either side of them, Ruth and Orpah.

With appropriate solemnity, have someone X out Elimelech, followed by Mahlon and Chilion. Draw sad faces on Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah. Ask:

What does the future look like at this moment for these three? What would their best options be at the moment for future security?

They're still in Moab; Ruth and Orpah are Moabites. The *best* option is suggested by Naomi—you girls go home now. Go find new husbands. Orpah does, but Ruth decides to stick with Naomi. Together they return to Bethlehem. Problem—the land that belonged to Elimelech is in danger of passing from his family, and with it goes any security for Naomi and Ruth. The ownership of the land would have passed from Elimelech to his sons, but *they* are also dead. If Ruth can find a husband from within the same family, she in effect would transfer with the property to her new husband. A bit messy, and culturally foreign to us, but a solution nonetheless. Ruth meets Boaz, kin to Elimelech and Mahlon. Boaz falls for her, and their marriage secures the future of Naomi and Ruth.

But there's more! Have someone read Ruth 4:13-14. Ask if anyone knows who Obed is. Obed is grandfather to David, who would become one of few good kings of Israel and from whose line Jesus would eventually be born.

RESPONSE

When have you felt completely helpless? How did that situation turn out?

What opportunities have you had to step in and help someone in need?

The major theme of Ruth is that someone is totally without power to help themselves and someone with that power steps in to redeem them. What massively obvious spiritual parallel can you draw here?

What does it mean to you to “be redeemed”?

How do you share your spiritual inheritance with others?

How well do you listen to others share about theirs—even if they have a different faith tradition?