

From zero to hero with God

Martyn Payne provides suggestions for focusing on some Old Testament heroines of faith – great for a five day holiday club or other special series.

An old Chinese saying reminds us that ‘women hold up half the sky’, simply because the role of women in history often goes unrecognised and uncelebrated. What is true globally is also true biblically. We can, with some justice, also claim that ‘women hold up half the Bible’ – not that our very patriarchal, Judeo-Christian heritage celebrates or records this fact at any great length. It is to explore and celebrate the role of some women of faith that the following holiday club material has been put together, focusing on the stories of five Old Testament heroines.

The five session outlines could form the material for a holiday club, become five parts of a series used in a teaching programme or provide selected material for a special day on this topic with children.

There are suggestions for opening warm-up activities, games, workshops and ways of handing the story and follow-up.

A simple structure for each session would include:

- A *Get started* activity – an icebreaker type game with all the children together.
Then, depending on the number of children, divide them up into two, three or even four groups so they can all experience a carousel of workshop activities to include:
 - a *Be active* game,
 - a craft activity,
 - a drama time, where they can act out the story of the day under direction from a leader,
 - a refreshment break.

Activities for every time you gather

Get started

Hero

Tap into the theme of heroes and heroines by asking the children to become lively statues of various famous superheroes demonstrating their superpowers. The children will soon let you know about these and they will range of course from X-Men to the Incredibles; from Wonder Woman to Spiderman and whoever else is current at the time.

Ready for action?

Devise a ‘get fit for superheroes’ routine, which is a basic physical workout to start off each day, but be sure to include some ‘silly’ exercises like finger-aerobics; toe-wagging and face-twitching!

Try some crazy 30-second endurance tests for superheroes, such as standing stock-still on one leg; sitting curled up as a tiny ball on the floor; staring without blinking; or balancing on only one hand and foot. Heroes are not necessarily the strongest or fastest people but are those who can use their gifts thoughtfully and appropriately. They are those who put the good and safety of others first.



Sarah
a faithful wife
and adventurer.

‘By faith Sarah was made strong... because she believed God’s promises were true.’ Based on Hebrews 11.11

Sarah had to trust in God as she set out into the unknown, along with her husband Abraham. They were sure that God had called them to a new future together and to discover that God would be with them, wherever they went.

You can find part of the story in Genesis 12.1-9.

Introduce a leader who plays the character of Sarah and interviews her about the long journey. Stress the risks taken in leaving the security of their home in Ur and the dangers and unknowns of the desert.

Explain that God calls all of us to be adventurous, following where he leads. Trusting in God is the foundation for being a true hero for him.

God also promised them a future (see Genesis 15.1-6), so invite a leader to tell the story of Sarah, how Abraham talked about the promise in the stars and how God promised that they would have a child one day, although this seemed completely out of the question. The story is in Genesis 18.1-15.

Sarah laughed at the news, she could not believe such a thing could be possible, but God kept his word.

Be active

Treasure hunt

Set up a simple treasure hunt with a series of clues leading each time to the next item. The first clue leads to some sand (their desert journey); then a second clue to a small tent (their mobile home); then a key (their new home in Canaan); and finally to a baby doll (representing their future). Just as in the game, Sarah and Abraham had to trust God’s words and work out what the promise would mean for them. Of course, both were far from perfect, particularly Sarah’s treatment of Hagar for example, but God used them and uses us, not because we are flawless but because we respond to him in faith.

Craft ideas

Sarah was called a princess and on their travels Abraham often feared for her safety because she was quite a beauty. How about making a ‘silver’ medallion necklace or headband for Sarah?

Others may prefer to make a model of Abraham and Sarah’s tent using long headless matchsticks for the poles and various coloured cloth coverings for the tent walls and roof.



From zero to hero with God continued



Miriam
a loyal sister
– the dancer

Miriam sang, 'Sing to God, because he has triumphed gloriously.'
Exodus 15.21

Miriam was Moses' sister. It was Miriam who watched over her baby brother in the bulrushes and arranged things so that their own mother would be appointed as his nursemaid on behalf of Pharaoh's daughter. The story is in Exodus 2.1-10. Later she led the celebrations after the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 15.19-21) and also took an important role on the journeys with Moses.

Introduce another leader who will play the part of Miriam.

Tell the story of Moses and the bulrushes from her point of view, then about the years when Moses was away and the terrible conditions of slavery in Egypt, finally the dramatic story of the plagues and the great escape.

Miriam was a big sister who looked out for a younger brother, probably on more than one occasion. She is also called a prophetess, which suggests that the people thought of her as someone who would bring God's words to them and as someone who would lead them in worship, just as she did after the miracle of the crossing of the Red Sea.

Be active

Dance for joy

Learn a dance together using some traditional Jewish rhythms (for example, the music that goes with *Junior Praise* 81 or 'Jesus put a song into our hearts'). A simple, traditional Israeli circle dance includes linking up in a circle with hands on each other's shoulders and then stepping to the music, first to the left and then to the right and then has everyone come into the centre and back out again.

Getting warmer

Play a game that involves one child hiding something (a small basket) and then standing watching as another group, who were out of the room, come in and try to find it. The other children can tell them whether they are warm or cold, that is, near or far from the hidden object. Other children could take turns hiding the basket and the one whose basket stays hidden the longest is the 'winner'!

Craft ideas

Miriam led the dancing, so making a tambourine would be useful! There's an example in *Roots* issue 21 page 24 and on the web site www.rootsontheweb.com.

She also watched over Moses in his basket, so why not make a model of this from card strips 'woven' together?



Abigail
a wise wife
– the peacemaker.

David said to Abigail, 'Blessed be your good sense, and blessed be you...' 1 Samuel 25.33

You can read Abigail's story in 1 Samuel 25. Married to a rich man (Nabal), who was far from easy to live with, she then becomes a key player in a potentially dangerous feud between David and her own husband. On the run from Saul, David had hoped for some food and shelter from Nabal but he had refused to help. Abigail steps in between David, with his angry plans for revenge, and Nabal's churlish inhospitality. She is a peacemaker and earns David's deepest respect. Nabal is so shocked by what his wife has done that, following a drunken night, he has what seems like a stroke and later dies. Some time later, Abigail becomes one of David's wives.

Be active

Freeze

Set up a simple mime where two people are in dispute and then a third person comes to hold them apart and make the peace. Freeze the action and notice how the peacemaker in the middle ends up in something of a cross shape, trying to hold the two parties apart or else bring them together with hands out over their shoulders. Peacemaking involves someone making a sacrifice and of course this is just what Jesus does for us all on the cross. This is what true heroes must imitate.

Making up

Choose someone to play the character of Abigail and interview her about her home life with Nabal, then there is David's request, Nabal's rude response and her actions about making peace, and what happens to them both afterwards.

Craft ideas

Make a special picture of this story using symbols for those involved. Perhaps use some sort of weapon for David on one side – such as a spear or sword – and a cup on the other to represent Nabal, as it seems he spent much of his time partying! In the middle, place the outline of a dove, which that is the symbol of peace, between the two, which was Abigail's role.

Make a cross using a crossbar balancing on a central stand. Hang symbols to represent Nabal and David on either end. Write 'Abigail' along the crossbar. Use this to show Abigail holding David and Nabal in balance, a peace that can be easily destroyed.

From zero to hero with God continued



Hannah a prayerful mother – the singer

Hannah sang, 'The Lord... will guard the feet of his faithful ones.'
1 Samuel 2.9

Hannah was Samuel's mother and you can read her story in 1 Samuel chapters 1 and 2. We first meet her as an unhappy but favourite wife, who has no children but who then turns to God in prayer. God answers that prayer and she bursts into song as well as dedicating her son to God in thanksgiving. Her song becomes an inspiration for Mary's own song of praise – the Magnificat – many centuries later, when she heard that she was to give birth to Jesus (Luke 1).

Be active

Listen with your eyes

Play a game involving trying to lip-read what someone in the group is saying, as a way of connecting with the story of the silent prayer that Eli notices on Hannah's lips. Of course he misjudges the situation and thinks she has been drinking too much!

Hannah's song

This could be sung to a clapping rhythm in an 'echo' style.

Thanks be to God – thanks be to God, for his care – for his care.
He's lifted me – he's lifted me, he's answered prayer – he's answered prayer.
All shall see – all shall see, the last come first – the last come first,
the poor grow rich – the poor grow rich, the weak be strong – the weak be strong.
He's kept his word – he's kept his word, he'll come one day – he'll come one day.
Thanks be to God – thanks be to God, and shout hurray – and shout hurray.
Hurrray.

Explain to the children that Hannah was chosen by God to be an important mother, but she also knew that her child was God's gift and one to be shared. True heroism doesn't hold on to things selfishly but lets them go in order to do well for others.

Craft ideas

The ark of the covenant was at Shiloh. Making a simple version of this involves using a block of wood for the basic box shape with two long poles (kebab sticks?) along two sides. On top were two angels with their wings outstretched toward the centre. Use some wooden pegs from a craft shop and glue some circular pieces of wood on either side of the pegs as the angel's wings. It should all be painted gold. Of course it is before this ark that young Samuel was sleeping when he heard God calling his name.

Alternatively, part of Hannah's song could be written out and decorated in different ways, using coloured paper or perhaps differently coloured pieces of pasta.



Rahab a believing outsider – the rescuer

'By faith Rahab was kept alive because she welcomed the strangers.' Based on Hebrews 11.31.

Rahab and her family were not part of the people of God but nevertheless did recognise that the Lord who led the Hebrews safely out of Egypt and across the desert was the one true God. The story is found in Joshua 2.

When Joshua's spies hid in her home, Rahab made sure that city 'police' never found them. They escaped out of her window in the wall, from which later she hung a scarlet cord as a sign to the victorious Hebrew army that she and her family should be spared. Later the whole family was welcomed and accepted as part of God's people.

Be active

Find the spy

Play a game of hide and seek to lead into the whole hidden spy story.

Tumbling down

Invite a leader to play the part of Rahab and interview her about all that happened when the spies came to her home, then their escape, and finally the dramatic account of the walls coming tumbling down but how her particular part of the wall stayed up so she, and her family, were safe.

Explain that Rahab was an outsider who had faith. Anyone who trusts in God can become one of God's heroes whatever his or her background. Rahab even ends up being one of the ancestors of Jesus himself (see Matthew 1.5) and also gets a royal mention in the parade of the faithful in Hebrews 11.31.

Craft ideas

The scarlet rope became a symbol for Rahab of her faith in God to save her and the family. A plaited version using various different shades of red in the style of a friendship bracelet would be a memory of this.

Others may prefer to make a cardboard model of the fallen walls of Jericho with one bit left standing, where Rahab and her family lived.

Additional resources

Jackie Stead (Ed.), *Women of the Word*, BRF, 2005, ISBN 1841014258.

Mike Coles, *God's Reality Show*, BRF, ISBN 1841013671.

Patrick Goodland, *Over 300 Games for All Occasions*, Scripture Union, ISBN 1859992641.

Ruth Wills, *Everyone's a winner*, Scripture Union, 2002, ISBN 1859995594.

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