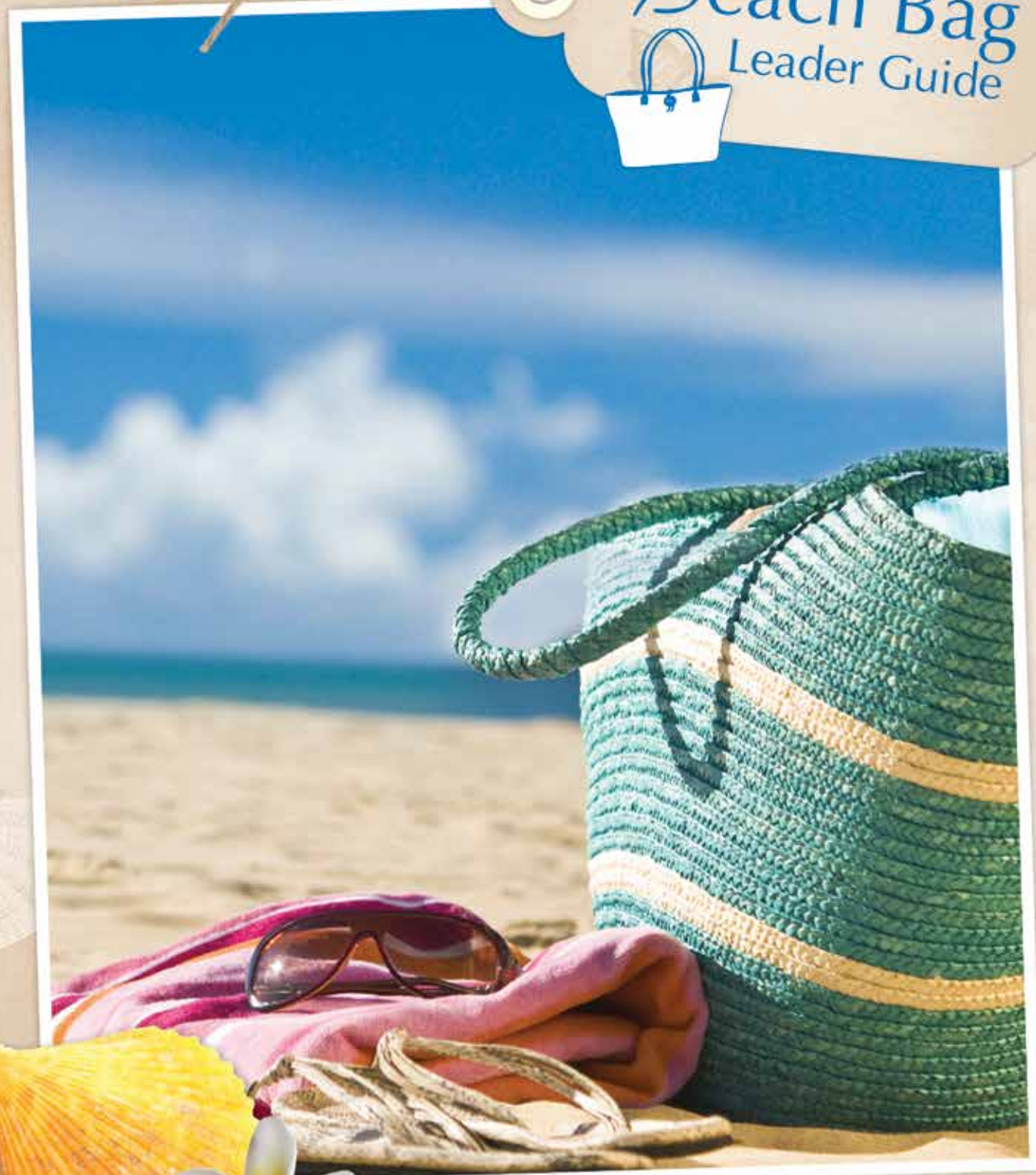


SeaSide
ESCAPE

Session 1:
Beach Bag
Leader Guide



Welcome

The SeaSide Escape Director will open this session with a welcome and any announcements, and then she'll introduce the Worship Leader, who will lead women in an opening activity where they will get into small groups. She will also lead a time of singing. The Worship Leader will then introduce you.

Let's Get Started!

Greet everyone enthusiastically!

Say: **Here we are at SeaSide Escape, a beach retreat. I came prepared with this great beach bag! Hold up the empty beach bag. Now I just need to pack it with the stuff I'll need for the day.**

Put the items into the bag as you mention them.



I'm having doubts about the weather, so I'm bringing along a jacket, just in case it's cold. And I'm bringing along sunscreen and a pair of shorts, just in case the sun is hot. I doubt there's going to be anything there that I want to drink, so I'm bringing along my favorite beverages. I doubt the snack bar will have any snacks that aren't packed with sugar, so I'll bring some fruit. And I doubt the beaches around here have adequate "facilities," so I'm bringing along a roll of toilet paper, too!

By now, the bag should be packed full and overflowing. Try to lift it, and show how heavy and bulky the bag is.

Wow. I might have brought along too much stuff. It seems like all my doubts about the day are weighing me down!

Set the bag and items aside. **It's the same with life. Our doubts become baggage weighing us down! Let's play a game that lets us have fun with some of our doubts—and will also help us get to know each other a little better.**

Doubter's Dilemma

Explain that everyone is going to play a game in their Getaway Groups—the groups of four they just got into during the worship time. While you're explaining how to play, have an assistant give each Getaway Group a set of the cards you prepared ahead of time.

You're going to play a game called Doubter's Dilemma, using the cards that you're receiving right now. The instructions for playing the game are on page 13 of your guide. Refer to those instructions, and play in your Getaway Group for about 10 minutes.

Let women play for about 10 minutes, and then have women count their cards and see who had the most in each group. Congratulate the winners, and then continue.

This is a fun game where we can express our doubts to each other. But in real life, we tend to have more serious doubts. Doubts like: "Where is God during this hard time of my life?" "Can I trust God?" "I doubt that God will come through." Take time now to reflect on these thoughts. Turn to page 14 of your



guide, where you'll see the heading "I Have My Doubts," and discuss those questions with your Getaway Group. You'll have about 5 minutes.

Allow 5 minutes for discussion, and then have women turn their attention back to you.

God's Word


There's a woman in the Bible who had a lot of doubts—and a lot of reasons for those doubts. Her name was Sarai, and her story is told in the first book of the Bible, Genesis. You'll find several chapters of Genesis in your guide in the "Words From the Bible" section, beginning on page 6, and you can refer to these often throughout our retreat. Or you can follow along in your own Bible.

Sarai's story is lengthy, so we're going to focus on a few key events in her life. To help us narrow in on some of these, we're going to read "letters" from Sarai to her cousin Ada, who was back in Sarai's homeland. Yes, these are just fictional retellings of her story, but the facts are from the Bible. Let's listen to Sarai read her letter aloud before mailing it. You can follow along on page 15 of your guide.

Read Sarai's "letter" aloud, or if you've invited someone ahead of time to do this for you, listen to her now. Then have women discuss the questions that follow this letter with their Getaway Groups.

Allow 5 minutes for discussion, and then have women turn their attention back to you.

Let's read from the Bible to see what happened to Sarai and Abram. You can find this on pages 6 and 7 of your guide, or follow along in your own Bible. Genesis 12:14-20 says:



¹⁴ And sure enough, when Abram arrived in Egypt, everyone spoke of Sarai's beauty. ¹⁵ When the palace officials saw her, they sang her praises to Pharaoh, their king, and Sarai was taken into his palace. ¹⁶ Then Pharaoh gave Abram many gifts because of her—sheep, goats, cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels.

¹⁷ But the LORD sent terrible plagues upon Pharaoh and his household because of Sarai, Abram's wife. ¹⁸ So Pharaoh summoned Abram and accused him sharply. "What have you done to me?" he demanded. "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? ¹⁹ Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' and allow me to take her as my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and get out of here!" ²⁰ Pharaoh ordered some of his men to escort them, and he sent Abram out of the country, along with his wife and all his possessions.



Supplies

You'll be leading everyone in a Bible study experience. You'll need:

- a large, colorful beach bag
- tube or bottle of sunscreen
- pair of shorts
- several bottles or cans of your favorite beverage
- a few pieces of fresh fruit
- two rolls of toilet paper
- Doubter's Dilemma cards found on the *Graphics & Other Goodies CD**. Each woman will need 6 cards, and there are 6 cards on a page, so copy one page for each person attending. These are easy to cut on a paper cutter!
- tape, 1 roll per 4 women
- paper clips
- *Music of SeaSide Escape CD** and a CD player or sound system.



*You'll find this in the SeaSide Escape Director's Kit. Additional copies are available from Group Publishing (group.com or 800-447-1070) or your church resource supplier.

SETUP

Here's how to get ready to lead your session:

- Read through this guide several times. You'll follow the content exactly as it's written. You don't have to memorize it; just be comfortable with the content. It's OK to read from this guide as you're leading women. Look for the content in bold type for the text you will be speaking aloud.
- Put the supplies that are going to end up inside the beach bag on a table that can be covered with a cloth or behind a counter where they're not visible. It will be more fun for women to see these as you pull them out and tell why you're packing them—it adds to the surprise!
- Put the Doubter's Dilemma cards in stacks of 24, and paperclip them together. This will make it quick and easy to distribute these to the Getaway Groups when you're ready to play the game.
- Put a roll of tape on each table.
- Consider having another woman read the "letter" (on page 15 of the *SeaSide Escape Participant Guide*) from Sarai to Ada with dramatic flair. This can add to the fun—and allows you to include someone else in your session. If you decide to have someone else read this segment for you, give her that section ahead of time so she can be prepared and feel comfortable with the content. Note that Sessions 1, 3, and 5 all include a letter from Sarai to Ada. Connect with the other leaders to decide if you want to choose the same person to read all these letters—it's nice for continuity.
- Play the *Music of SeaSide Escape CD* as women arrive, and then continue playing it softly as they talk in small groups. Background music is great for setting a comfortable tone in your room.
- Pray! Ask God to open the hearts of women to each other and to him.

Paradise Pointer Expect a lot of sharing and laughing. To avoid raising your voice to get women's attention, bring along an attention-grabbing noisemaker.






This couple had their doubts about God's plans for them and took matters into their own hands. God still protected them and, in fact, punished the Pharaoh and his people instead of Abram and Sarai. But it's clear that taking matters into their own hands didn't work well.

My Doubts

On page 16 of your guide, you'll find a page simply labeled "My Doubts." I'm going to turn on some music for a couple of minutes, and while it's playing, I'd like you to quietly consider areas of doubt you're struggling with right now and write them in the box. These can be general or deeply personal. No one will see them, and you don't have to share them. In fact, after you've written your doubts in this

box, I'd like you to take one of the Doubt cards we used in our game earlier and tape it over what you've written.

 Play "Come to the Water" (track 5 on the *Music of SeaSide Escape* CD) while women reflect and write. Then turn off the music.

As we continue our time at SeaSide Escape, we're going to continue looking at the life of Sarai, digging more deeply into the circumstances of her life, and see how God was involved at every step of the way.

Close this session with prayer, asking God to help each woman open her heart to God and consider his ability to handle those doubts she wrote about.



SeaSide ESCAPE



SeaSide Escape Session 1 Leader Guide: Beach Bag

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