

SARA'S STORY



A Teaching Story

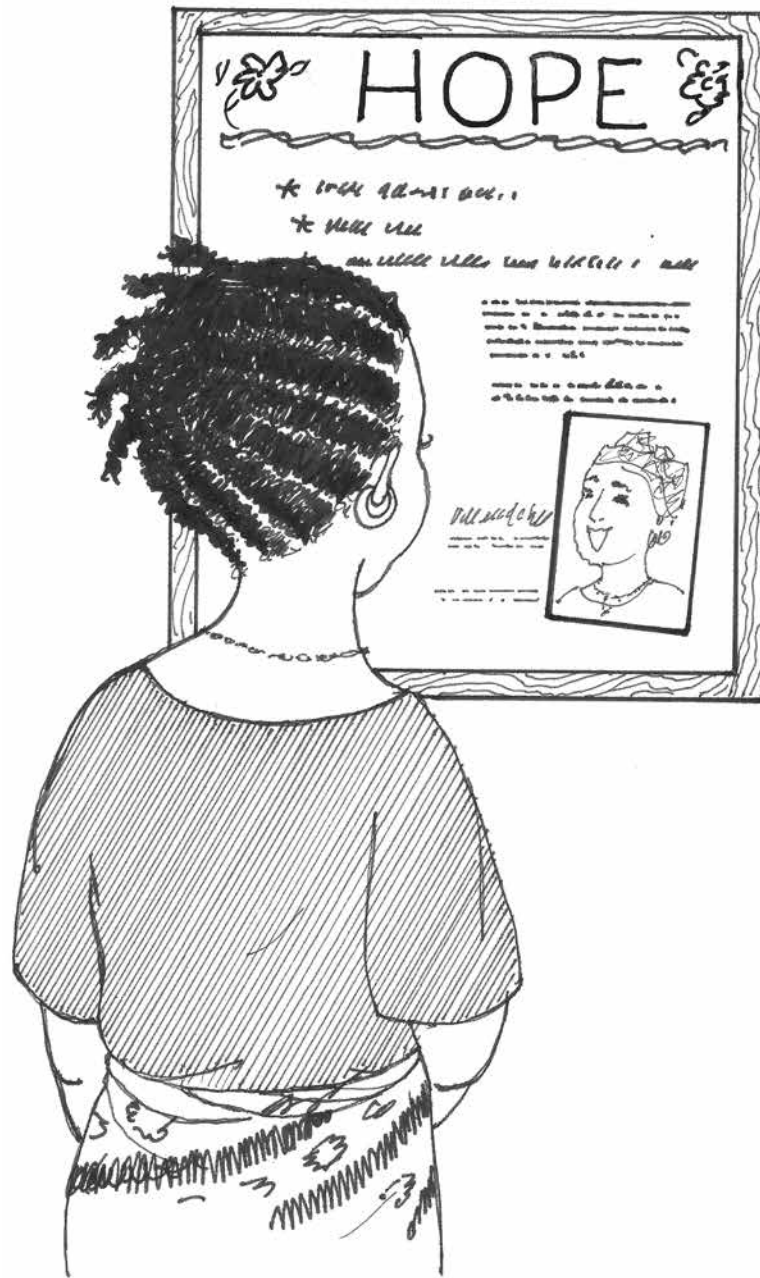
Original author Ruth Craig, Edited by Beth Ratzlaff

Illustrated by Ruth Wick



When Sara was a child, she laughed and played all day. She dreamed of becoming a good mother with a house full of children. In her mind they were always healthy, dressed in school uniforms, and carrying schoolbooks. She also wanted to make other people's lives better. She saw herself feeling confident and loved, always laughing and smiling.

Sara's life today is different. She doesn't feel valued or loved. She has little money to buy good food, clothes, or a safe place for her family. She doesn't know how things will get better. But she knows she must find a way to keep her family from being hungry.



One day, while getting water, Sara hears someone talking about the Hope Business Program. The program helps women learn how to start a business to support their family. Sara always thought business owners needed to be rich. She is not. She believed they had to finish secondary school and university. She has not. Shelly, the woman leading the program, tells Sara that she can start a business too.

She says that the program teaches that Jesus loves her and will always be with her. Jesus can give her hope that is strong enough to carry her through hard times. Starting a business? Jesus? Sara does not think any of this is for her, but she is curious.



Sara feels nervous when she walks into the first class. So she stands in the back and watches. She is not sure she belongs here. Shelly introduces herself and welcomes everyone. She says the first thing they need is a good idea. The class will help them decide what kind of business to start. It will also help those who already have a business.

At first, Sara doesn't know what she can do. Then she realizes that she knows how to make bread. Maybe she could start a business selling bread!

Something important is happening, but Sara hasn't noticed it yet. A seed of hope slips into her heart.



Shelly explains that the Hope Business Program is about helping each other, not competing. Group members will encourage and support one another.

Later, they must decide: Should they apply for a loan or start a small bank, sharing and lending money? Either way, everyone who borrows must promise to repay it.

Students who work hard in Unit 1 will be invited to continue. They must show they are ready to run a business by attending every class, arriving on time, and working on their business between classes. If they apply for a group loan, these actions will prove they can be trusted to repay their share.

The group will meet for about a year to learn and grow their businesses. They will keep meeting until the loan and fees are paid, and they may continue meeting after that.

Shelly says that one of the first steps in starting or growing a business is to imagine what it could be like. That is called a “Big Hope”.



Sara feels fear deep in her stomach. She wonders if she can do this. Shelly says that they will need a business plan to make their “Big Hope” happen. The lessons will teach them how to write the plan step by step. They will learn to create a business that meets a need and stands out because it is different. They will plan so that customers will like the business and it will make money.

Parts of the business class come from the Bible. Shelly says God loves each one of them and everyone is important. God promises to help them grow strong inside. They can grow strong enough to do the hard work of building a business.



Some people sign up. Others don't. For some of them it is the wrong time. Others don't want to own a business. Some walk away because they cannot believe that hope is possible. Sara knows that feeling but she decides to try the class.



Sara lives at the orphanage and helps in the kitchen. The next day, she tells the cook about the class. “Can I use the kitchen to bake bread to sell?” she asks. “I can work extra hours to pay for it.”

The cook likes the idea! Sara is amazed. She just took a step toward her Big Hope. Her seed of hope is growing!



Sara learns everything she can. Starting a business takes so much planning! Together they learn about making a profit and keeping good business records. At one class Shelly teaches about running an honest business. They talk about treating others fairly and telling the truth, even when it is hard.

After each class Sara uses what she learns to take a step toward launching her business. It has been a long time since Sara has worked this hard. It feels good!



One week, Sara takes the next step toward starting her business by talking to shoppers at the market.

She asks, “What kind of business do you need?” She also asks, “Why do you shop here? What do you like about this shop?” She wants to learn what makes some businesses more profitable than others.

She discovers that people go back to businesses that are honest and sell good quality products. They also go back if they are treated kindly and if every person is shown respect.



Sara discovers that only one other person sells bread at the closest market, and it is not fresh. Maybe that's why so many people come to the cook's kitchen door asking to buy bread.

Sara has an idea! She asks the cook if she could start selling her own bread at the back door during her extra hours in the kitchen. The cook agrees. Sara is so thankful!

Now, Sara needs to learn how much it costs to make a loaf of bread, how much to charge customers, and how many loaves she must sell to make a profit. She writes down her ideas so she can share them with her class.



Each student is ready to present her Big Hope at the next meeting.

Some of the students have decided to start a business together so that they can help each other more. They call it a co-op. Others want to grow a business they already have.

Sara wants to start her own business. When it is her turn, she stands in front, takes a deep breath, and shares her vision. Her Big Hope is to build a business that sells fresh bread at fair prices to happy customers. She explains why her business is needed, how it will be different, and how she will tell people about it. She also describes the steps she is taking, and how much money she needs to start.

Sara smiles when she sits down. She is beginning to feel like she can do important things well. She knows the whole group is stronger when she is present and involved.



The classes continue. The students learn more about God and about business.

They keep hearing about God's love for them. It is hard for Sara to imagine anyone loving her like that. Shelly says that God knows everything about them and truly cares. Sara aches to believe that.

Shelly prays for them at every class, and they begin to pray for each other too. Sara's hope is growing. She hopes God really cares about her, and that she could trust and love him too.



Sara keeps picturing her Big Hope. She works toward it by starting early in the kitchen, completing her Next Steps Homework, and visiting bakers and shop owners to learn about the bread business. She loves learning from the cook, and together they try new recipes.

Sara smiles, thinking about the cook when Shelly talks about treating others with respect. She realizes the cook knows a lot about baking, is kind, and always tells the truth. Sara listens carefully, arrives early, and does her best.



During one class, Shelly shares exciting news. The group has been approved for a loan! Most students who attended every class, and worked hard on their businesses will be invited to continue and share the loan. Over the weeks, they decided on their businesses, made plans, and prepared. They have grown closer to God and feel that he is helping them grow stronger.

Sara's heart is full! Good changes have already happened. She can see that others feel the same. They are grateful.



Finally, they are ready to turn their business plans into reality!

The whole group is going to work together to build successful businesses. They accept the loan, knowing they must repay the money and support each other. If someone fails to keep their promise, it will affect everyone in the group.

Each person carefully considers signing the agreement to repay her share of the loan. If needed, they will also help others in the group, so that the full loan is repaid.

Sara imagines how good it will feel to finish repaying the money she is borrowing. She has already done many hard things and knows she can do this too. She is ready to keep working hard even when things get tough.



Sara gives Shelly a list of the things she needs to start her business. Shelly approves it and gives Sara the money. She uses her loan to buy bread pans, flour, and yeast - only what she really needs. She can buy more when her business grows.

Sara encourages the other students. She listens well, participates, and stays until the end of class. She saves money to use later, using the tools she has to build a business and improve her life. She has never worked this hard at anything.

In class, they talk about the hard things they have already done. Sara realizes that she has started holding her head up higher. Growing stronger and more confident feels great!



Sara is proud of all she is learning, but keeping good financial records is still hard for her to understand. She decides to ask Shelly for extra help.

When they are together, she also asks Shelly to tell her more about Jesus. Shelly reminds Sara that God loves her. She says that he loved her enough to die for her. Sara bows her head in prayer. She thanks God for his love and forgiveness. She looks up at Shelly with happy tears in her eyes.



Shelly teaches about marketing. Between classes, students plan ways to tell people about their businesses. Sara's plan is to put up signs about her bread business. She designs signs that are creative and get people's attention. The sign she likes the most hangs at the back door of the kitchen.

Sara also asks the students in her class to tell others about her bread business, and she offers a free loaf of bread to anyone who sends her a new customer.

Sara prays for courage, then she takes free bread samples to the owner of the local market. He tastes her bread and agrees to sell it for her.



The next day, the man at the market tells her that her first loaf of bread has sold. Before long, there are customers buying her bread every day! Some buy it at the market and some at the kitchen door. They love her bread! Sara is thankful.

After a few weeks, Sara asks the man at the market if he would sell other baked goods for her. He says he would like to sell rolls.

She knows it will take a lot of discipline to get up two hours earlier every morning if she is going to make rolls. When she thinks about her Big Hope, though, she knows what she must do.

She tells the man at the market she will do it.



Shelly has warned that when running a business, not all days are sunny and bright. Sometimes bad things happen. When it rains, fewer people go shopping at the market. When the kitchen ovens break down, she can't bake her bread. When one thing does not work, she tries something else.

Sara is grateful that they learned to save money for hard times. Some students decide to try different businesses. Still, they do not give up.



Sara has another idea—she could sell her bread to local schools. She prays about it. Sara figures out how much money she could earn if she sells bread to the school. She also thinks about what the extra costs would be.

She sees that she could afford to hire two friends to help her bake and deliver bread. They could also help her by passing out free bites of her bread and rolls in the market, encouraging people to buy more if it tastes good. They could help at the back door of the kitchen too. More people are coming there to buy bread.

She talks to the headmaster. He has heard that her bread is delicious and that she is trustworthy. He agrees to buy her bread for the school children if it can be delivered.

Sara changes her business plan and reviews her financial records. She tells the school that she can deliver the bread. So, she gets the job. Her steady energetic effort is paying off!



As the months go by, Sara thinks of more ways to keep her customers happy.

She brings her business records to class each week and is honest about reporting how much she makes. She is happy when she makes a profit and even happier when she sees that her savings account is growing.



When it is time to start repaying her loan, Sara remembers the lessons Shelly taught about doing what you say you will do. Sara feels good about her plans. She has the money she needs for her loan payments. She learned so much about making her business grow. She is growing in ways she never could have imagined.

They keep meeting to encourage and help each other, to save, and to continue to learn. They have started to work on a group project together. They want their project to help others who are hungry.

One joyful day the students pay the last loan payment!

Shelly congratulates them and tells them about the ceremony and celebration. It is a proud moment for everyone when they get their certificates saying they repaid their loans and have completed the Hope Business Program.



When Sara looks back on all that has happened since she became a part of the Hope business class, she can hardly believe it. She has a business that is needed. Her customers are thankful for her good bread. She has paid back the money she borrowed plus the loan fee. She has money saved. She takes better care of herself. She is respected.

Most important of all, she knows she is never alone. Jesus is always with her.



Sara thinks of all the ways her life has changed. She knows that God loves her. She has a business and ideas for ways it can continue to grow. She has some money saved for hard times. She is so thankful! One of the most life-changing lessons was learning to help others.

Sara loves helping others. She decides to bake one extra loaf to give away every day.



When Sara looks in the mirror, she sees a woman she hardly recognizes.

She sees a woman God loves.

She sees a strong woman who knows she matters. She can do things in a way that is different from anyone else. She feels confident.

She sees a woman who can see goodness all around her.

She wants others to have hope too.

She smiles. She sees hope.