

Thinking About Sunday's Message

Thinking about the Biblical text

Think about the “patriarchs” of the Old Testament (men like Abraham and Isaac and Jacob). What comes to mind when you think of them?

How do the stories of their experiences with God impact you? (If at all . . .)

Read Hebrews 11:8-22—a New Testament “commentary” on a number of these patriarchs.

What is underscored about Abraham’s life?

What is highlighted in the lives of Isaac and Jacob and Joseph?

As they are discussed in Hebrews, what is the common thread that holds these stories of these lives together? What do all the lives of the patriarchs share?

As you listen to what the author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote, how do you think about “the big story of the Bible”?

Thinking about what that means for our lives

In Hebrews 11:6 we are told that without faith—living in a vital dependence on God—it is impossible to live in a way pleasing to Him. Realizing that, what benefit do you see in looking back at the lives of the patriarchs? What real and personal benefit could come from developing some understanding of how they lived in relationship to the living God?

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Where we are headed this week

This week we re-enter the world of the book of Genesis. It has been awhile since we have been in Genesis, as a church; the last time was over a year ago when we walked through the life of Jacob. We are going to pick up in Genesis with Joseph, and this week we only want to “prime the pump” for our exploration of his life.

Both in the message and in this discussion guide, this week we are focusing on thinking about why we bother with dipping into the lives of the patriarchs. We are not looking for *principles for making life work*; we really are interested in focusing on *how people experience life with God*. For that reason, we are going to dip into the book of Hebrews and listen to what that author has to tell us about the patriarchs . . . and what that might mean for us.

Thinking about the discussion

For many people, the patriarchs are just “those guys” who lived back in the day of Genesis. As you start your discussion, there really isn't anything specific you should be looking for; you really just want to invite your people to think about “those guys” like Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Who were they? What happened to them? And, with a little gentle prodding, maybe you can stir some thought in answering the question: What difference does it make to us to know anything about them?

The Sunday morning message will root our thinking back in the book of Genesis, but rather than trying to survey a large section of that book, it might be a bit easier to turn to Hebrews. In Hebrews 11, we get a short synopsis of what happened in the lives of a number of the patriarchs, as well as some thoughts about *what we might glean* from their lives.

In preparing for the discussion, you might find it helpful to glance back over the sections in Genesis that tell the accounts of those we meet in Hebrews. You can find Abraham's story in Genesis 12-25. You read about Isaac in Genesis 21-27. Jacob's story is found in 25-35. You don't need to master all the details of their lives, but a little “refresher” will help you make better sense of

the background for what the author of the letter to the Hebrews has to say.

When you begin exploring Hebrews, what should you keep in mind? Ultimately, we want to think well about why the lives of these patriarchs matter to us! We want to stir some thought about the value, for our own lives, of reflecting on the lives of these Old Testament saints.

Often, we turn to these accounts to lift out “principles” from their lives. (Like the teaching about how to find a wife for your son based on what Abraham did in finding a wife for his son.) But such a “principle” approach to the accounts tends to overlook what is really being offered us. These narratives of the lives of the patriarchs are not primarily collections of guidelines or principles or instructions about *what to do*. They are true to life pictures of *how people lived in relationship with the living God*. As such, they provide us examples of relationship, and tell us something about what God is like.

As you read and discuss the Hebrews passage, notice the emphasis on “faith.” In the context of Hebrews, the idea of “faith” is one of “dependence upon, trust in, reliance upon.” What we are being told is how these patriarchs leaned on God, how they looked to and rested on Him. Although mention is made of what they did, the focus is really more about *who and how* they trusted God and what life looked like as they did that.

This kind of thinking can be the doorway into a discussion of why we bother to look at the lives of the patriarchs. It isn't that we are under the same covenant that they were; it isn't that we will inherit the identical promises. We don't live in identical circumstances and we will not likely be faced with the same kinds of challenges. But the dynamic of *faith-rooted living* is what is pictured and what is valuable to us.

Hebrews 11: 6 reminds us that our entire relationship with the living God is, fundamentally, rooted in faith. We live as those dependent upon God, carried along in His story, drawn into what He is doing for the display of His own glory. And that is what is common between the lives of the patriarchs and our own lives. And that is why their journeys with God can be helpful to us. We get to watch someone live in dependence, rely on God, grow in faith—and we can watch modelled the kind of faith-based, grace-rooted, God-dependent life we all long to have.