

“MEMORIES AND STORIES”

(Genesis)

For The Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta

By Sally Ulrey

Key verses: Genesis

“I am your shield and your very great reward...” (Gen. 15:1)

Objective:

- **To understand Genesis as a collection of stories of God’s faithfulness to individuals as they muddle through life**
- **To learn a little bit about what’s in Genesis**
- **To record our own stories of God’s faithfulness, and learn others’ stories**

The Set up: Minimal

The Plan:

- **Hook:** Old People Telling Stories (15 mins)
 - Option 1: Show the video of stories from 3 centenarians. (9 to 13 mins)
 - Option 2: Invite a senior adult to come in for an “interview”
- **Book:** Overview of Genesis (15 mins)
 - Looking at the main events of Genesis, recognize that the stories show God’s faithfulness throughout the events of the lives of Israel’s forbearers.
- **Look:** Our Stories (15 mins)
 - After reflecting on the ups and downs of their own lives, look for God’s faithfulness, and share in small groups
- **Took:** Stories of Spiritual Forbearers (5 mins)
 - Take home interview questions to ask those senior adults who have helped shape our faith.

The Supplies:

- Copy of lesson
- Individual copies of “Life Lessons” page, one for each student
- Bibles
- AV Equipment
- Paper and Pens

The Preparation:

- Make copies of “Life Lessons” page
- Cue up AV equipment and video
- **OR** Talk to a senior adult of faith about coming in for a 15 min interview to share some stories from their life and faith

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Old People Telling Stories (Hook, 15 mins)

This lesson makes an analogy between the way Genesis is set up and how old people tell the stories about their lives. What's the point of Genesis? It's that through all those ups and downs and triumphs and losses and changes and transitions, God is faithful. God forged a covenantal relationship with Abraham (and descendants), and God remained faithful to that covenant, and those in the stories could see that. It's like an old person remembering all the things he/she has been through, and just telling stories. Sometimes, you're not quite sure of the point, because the story is submitted factually without commentary. Sometimes, there's clearly a lesson learned. But one thing remains: God. God was there the whole time.

LEADER TIP: *If you recruit a senior adult for an interview, you are going to have to be very aware of timing! If they aren't very loquacious, you may want to have extra questions ready, but if they talk a lot, you may only want to ask the first and last one.*

Option 1: Show the Clip of Centenarians

- Introduce the clip by talking about how it's important to learn from the stories of those who are older and have more life experience. They have an important perspective to give.
- Show the clip. Show at least until 9:07 mins. The whole thing is 13:29 mins
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9AThycGCakk>

Option 2: Interview a Senior Adult (of faith)

- Introduce the person and talk about how it's important to learn from stories and perspectives of those with more life experience.
- As time permits (the first and last are the most important), ask:
 - When and where were you born? How did you end up here?
 - What was one of your happiest memories from throughout your life?
 - What was a loss that you had to deal with, and how did you do that?
 - Where have you seen God's faithfulness in your life?
 - What life lessons have you learned that you would you pass on to these young people?
- Thank the person for coming and speaking to the group

Transition: The Book of Genesis is kind of like an older person who is reflecting on his/her life and telling the stories of how they got to where they are. Sometimes, the stories are submitted without commentary, so you're not totally sure what you're supposed to glean from them. Sometimes, there is a clear lesson to be learned. And sometimes the stories are a little meandering. But the one thing that remains constant in all those stories presented in Genesis is that God was there. Through all the changes, triumphs, losses, happy parts, scary parts....God was always there. Let's take a look....

Overview of Genesis (Book, 15 mins)

In this section, we'll have the students briefly look over the main headings of Genesis and make some observations. The point of this lesson is not to teach every story from Genesis, but to give a big picture overview, so they can understand the book as a whole. That way, if they ever do read through the book, it will help them to understand the stories in their context.

LEADER TIP: You will want to look over the Mini-Lecture in advance to be familiar with what all is in Genesis. You could also make PowerPoint slides of the key points and people using the bullet points below.

Quick Observations (7 mins)

- Put students in groups of 2-3. Give each group a paper and pen. Have them designate a scribe.
- Have the students open their Bibles to Genesis
- Give each group about 3 mins (not long) to look over the headings. Give them another minute to make some observations about what stories are included and what that could mean.
- Quickly have the groups share anything that stuck out to them.

Mini-Lecture (7 mins)

- Genesis is the story of God's people, and how they became the nation of Israel, starting with Adam, and ending with Joseph.
- It's the story of individuals muddling through life....and how God was always there
- What's in Genesis?
 - First, some famous stories from Adam to Abraham (Noah and the flood, the tower of Babel...which shows the culture Abraham was called out of)
 - Second, some stories about God's covenant (sacred promise) relationship with Abraham and Ab's descendants. You hear Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob a whole bunch throughout Scripture. They are called the Patriarchs (the forefathers)...the line of descendants God built a nation from.
 - **Abraham:** journey to be faithful in believing God's promise of a child, and trusting enough to follow God wherever God may lead
 - **Isaac and Rebekah's** story of God's providence and provision in helping them find one another
 - **Jacob's** troubled start to life and his meeting God
 - Jacob taking two wives, **Rachel and Leah**, their rivalry, and their journeys and struggles with being wives and mothers, and God's provision for them
 - **Jacob's 12 sons** (the oldest with his favorite wife, Rachel, was Joseph...he was the favorite son)
 - How **Joseph** (and eventually the rest of the family) ended up in Egypt
 - Genesis sets the stage for how this huge nation of descendants came about, and then their slavery in Egypt

Transitional Statement: It really is like old people reflecting on all the events of their lives, and telling the stories of how they muddled through, but God was there. The main theme can be summed up in verse 15:1. God tells Abraham to not be afraid, because "I am your shield and your very great reward." No matter what ups and downs Abraham will face in life, God is telling him that God will be with him, and that God's presence with Abraham is enough.

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Our Stories (Look, 15 mins)

In this part, students will get a chance to reflect on their own life stories, the ups and downs, how they've muddled through, but how God has been there.

- Ask them to reflect on the following questions on their paper (they don't have to write essays, just make notes so they'll remember what they mean)
 1. When and where were you born? What's the story of how you ended up in this place in your life (this location and this church)?
 2. What was one of your happiest memories from throughout your life?
 3. What was a loss that you had to deal with, and how did you do that?
 4. Where have you seen God's faithfulness in your life, where you've felt or thought that God was with you or was taking care of you?
 5. What life lessons have you learned?
- Put them back into their group of 2-3 (when they looked through the Bible). Have them share question 4 and 5 with their groups if they're willing

Stories of our Spiritual Forbearers (Took, 5 mins)

This is the take-home assignment for them to learn about the stories of faith of one of their “Spiritual Forbearers”... someone who has helped shape their faith, who has “passed on” his/her faith to them. The easiest person would be a parent, but they could also ask a godparent, a grandparent, a priest, youth leader, etc. The idea is to ask someone who’s had an impact on them about his/her personal faith and how God has been there. They’ll take home their “Life Lessons” sheet, and use the same questions to interview the person.

- Tell them to get their “Life Lesson” piece of paper in their hand right now, because they’re going to take it home with them.
- Explain that their assignment is to learn the faith stories of one of their “Spiritual Forbearers”, someone who’s a little older, who has helped shape their faith, whose faith has inspired them. Explain that this can be a parent, godparent, grandparent, priest, youth leader...anyone in their family or spiritual family whose faith has influenced them.
- Instruct them to take their “Life Lessons” paper and use the questions to interview the person of their choosing.
- Have them WRITE DOWN A NAME or NAMES on their paper of people of faith who have inspired their faith, whom they might wish to interview.
- Tell them that as they pray, there will be a time for them to offer a prayer of thanksgiving for those names (out loud).

Close in prayer, saying something like...

Faithful God, the God of our spiritual forbearers...The God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel and Leah, thank you for their stories of faith and for everyone in our families and in our families of faith who have inspired and shaped our faith in You. We especially thank You for [prompt youth to add the names they wrote on their papers]. Thank You for all these people of faith who share their stories with us, and inspire us to be faithful as we try to muddle through life. Thank You, God for always being with us, through all our ups and downs, triumphs and losses, and in every detail of our lives. Go with us this week as we try to follow you. Amen.

LIFE LESSONS

The word of the Lord came to Abram... "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield and your very great reward" (Gen 15:1)

Instructions:

Reflect on your own life stories, the ups and downs, how you've muddled through, but how God has been there.

Think about the following questions. You don't have to write essays, but make some notes or draw some pictures so you remember your answers.

1. When and where were you born? What's the story of how you ended up in this place in your life (this location and this church)?
2. What was one of your happiest memories from throughout your life?
3. What was a loss that you had to deal with, and how did you do that?
4. Where have you seen God's faithfulness in your life, where you've felt or thought that God was with you or was taking care of you?
5. What life lessons have you learned?

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