



32 Days with Abraham

Sampler

**devotions for life
by Mark R. Etter**

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1. Seeing the Value Underneath Gen. 12:1

He almost missed it. Buried on the yard sale table was a tarnished tea pot amidst an array of ceramic vases and chipped glasses. It hardly looked like it was worth the five dollar price that the owner had put on it. Yet, when he saw it, John immediately picked it up and weighed it in his hands. He scanned its tarnished surface and after a second or two knew that he had a hidden treasure. Quietly, he paid the young girl manning the cash box and headed to his car with the tea pot and a few other items.

At home, he used a small hammer to work out the dings that marred the surface of the tea pot and returned the gentle curve to the surface. He found his tin of silver polish and began to clean years of tarnish off the surface with a series of gentle strokes. His wife thought he was crazy for spending so much time on a worthless old pot. Yet, as the layers of grime slowly came off, the reason John has treasured this pot became apparent. The name of its maker, Paul Revere, was engraved on the bottom. What the world had seen and discarded as a worthless pot was a valuable piece of history that John had affectionately restored.

The first chapters of Genesis record one failure after another for mankind. A perfect couple is created by God only to fall into sin and begin to accuse each other. Their first children are born and the first murder is recorded after a number of years have past. The world continues down this path of sin and corruption until God finds it necessary to cleanse His world by a flood. Even the flood can not stop the rebellion as man begins to build a tower that will reach to the skies. A casual reader of these early chapters of Genesis would wonder what God was going to do with the human race. Should He destroy mankind and start again? The answer is that God has a different idea of how to create a people for himself.

God called a man and wife to leave their home so that God might give humanity a new beginning. Abram and Sarai were not perfect by any means. Like the silver pot they were tarnished. Joshua 24:2 reminds us that Abram's family worshipped other gods when it says *"Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods"* Yet, the

Lord called him (Acts 7:2) at a time when he was living in Ur of the Chaldees. God called him from this great city of wealth and culture. God called him from a city that was devoted to the moon goddess. God called Abram to follow and make a new start that would change the world. Like the tea pot, God saw something in this tarnished pot of a man and took him to be His own.

For Abram to be useful to God, he needed to be polished. He needed the tarnish to be taken slowly off his life. God did that by calling Abram to *"Leave your country"* He was to leave that place of idolatry where the moon god was worshipped. He was to leave this place of money and power. He was to leave this comfortable place where it would be so easy to fall back into the old habits that were so much a part of this world. The world that Abram grew up in ran counter to the values of the Lord. Abram could not live there and create a new life with the Lord. He could not keep one foot in this world of idols and fast living and try to live a new life for the Lord.

The call of Abram is a call for us. Our God does not expect us to be polished when we come to Him. He does want us to be willing to leave things as we cling to Him. He wants in a place where we can be polished and made new. Over the next thirty one days, we will follow the life of Abraham and see the process of that polishing. We will see how the Lord wants to challenge us and change us. It may get a little uncomfortable at times, but take time to stop and think about the lessons from Abraham's life. You will see Abraham at his best and at his worst. You will see that this great man became great only because he allowed the Lord to work in his life. You will have a glimpse of what you can be when the master takes the tarnish off your life and exposes the person that he created underneath. Our goal is summarized in 2 Cor. 5:17, *"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come."*

- What would you like your life to look like as God takes away the tarnish?

6 Who controls your fate? Gen. 14:1-13

Your friends determine your fate. If you don't believe it, look at your kids. The friends that your children choose determine their future. Let a child get in with the wrong group and you will have nothing but trouble. Friends influence children to alcohol, drugs and a host of other destructive habits. Let a child make friends in a good sports or music program where they are around well behaved children and they often stay out of trouble. It really is no different for adults. Adults who frequent the bars or hang around with people who have trouble holding down a job will be pulled down by their friends. Adults who spend a lot of time around strong Christians or have a set of friends with strong morals will be pulled up by these friends. Who you spend your life with will determine your fate.

This is the first battle mentioned in the Bible. Its importance is its strong connection to Abram and Lot. The five cities of the plains rebel against their masters, the four cities of the east. The armies from the east march out to wage war on the rebellious cities of the plains. In response, *"the king of Sodom . . . marched out and drew up their battle lines."* (v.8) One would have expected that the five cities could defend themselves on their own turf, but they are routed and many fall into tar pits in the midst of their escape. The conquering army takes the goods and food of Sodom and Gomorrah as they depart. Such bounty was used to pay for and feed their troops. This is where this battle connects with the characters of the Bible.

Lot had moved from outside the city (13:12) to moving into the city (14:12). Now he would share their fate. Nothing in the text says that he went out into the battle, but *"They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions."* (v.12) He would pay the price for their loss because he had now become one of them. Perhaps, he felt that he could separate himself from their evil and live among them, but not really become one of them. Whatever his thoughts, he had thrown his portion in with Sodom and now was reaping the fruit of his choices. The capture of Lot demonstrates that you will share the fate of those who you call friends.

At first, while the battle is raging in the valley below, Abram is living safely up in the hills of Palestine. *"Now Abram was living near*

the great trees of Mamre the Amorite." (v.13) The battle never threatens his flocks or his people. Having never allied himself with the people of Sodom, he and his people were safe up on the hill and were unaffected by the battle below. He had cast his portion with the Lord. He had avoided the lure of the evil cities. He had made alliances with some of the Amorites (14:13) for protection and trade, but had remained true to his God. Lot had desired the riches and the lifestyle of the world. Abram was content to live with his Lord.

Who do you associate with? No one can enter the house of the worldly and not be untouched. Their fate will affect your work, your family and your life. They may lure you in with their riches or excitement, but you will also share in their destiny. We cannot expect God to protect us from harm when we try to live in the wild animal's den. Abram was not isolated, but he did live apart from those who lived caustic lives in the valley below. We should try to help our neighbor, but we dare not live among them lest we become one of them. As we choose our friends and associates, we often chose our future. Those who cast their lot with the world will face the consequences that Lot faced.

One doubts that this story would have even been mentioned in scripture if Lot had lived with his flocks in the valley rather than in the city. The armies might have looted the city and not even known that Lot and his flocks were three or four miles away. The danger might have all passed him by as he lived outside the city and not in the middle of Sodom. We do have a choice. We can live safely in the hills with God or dare to live in the midst of evil. We all know people who have gotten into the wrong crowd and feel that life would be different if they had a different set of friends. As you think of your own life, consider how it would be blessed if you sought out Godly friends who could nurture you and help you draw closer to the Lord. Our friends do have an effect on our fate. Godly friends lift us up and worldly friends can pull us down.

- Which of your friends tend to bring out the best in you? How could you develop those relationships so that they lift you even higher?

12 A great God deserves great people Genesis 17: 1-14

There can be no doubt that we have an Almighty God. Yet, our world often doesn't see Him that way. They see His church and it seems to them lifeless and empty. They see churches that are filled with entertainment value and not powerful preaching. They see Christians who live no differently than their non Christian friends and coworkers. Is it any wonder that people think that our God is weak and powerless because of what they see among His people? A great God will be shown to the world by great people. When His people reflect His values and His actions, the world notices and sees that our God is truly great.

God reveals Himself to us as the one who is all sufficient and calls His children to show His greatness to the world. *"I am the Lord Almighty, walk before me and be blameless."* (v.1) Thirteen years before this, Abram and Sarai had tried to make God's promises come true by their own hand. They had devised a plan where Abram would take Hagar as his concubine and give birth to Ishmael. The plan had caused them nothing but grief for it was not God's plan. God calls them to live as His people and trust Him. He wants them to follow Him and live in His promise. The time for the promise to be fulfilled was close. The time had come for God to show the world through Abram and Sarai exactly how great He really was.

God begins the revelation by reaffirming the promises made almost twenty five years before. *"As for me, this is my covenant with you. You will be the father of many nations."* (v.4) Abram may have begun to give up on ever seeing the promises come true, but God had not forgotten them. God reaffirms the promise of a great host of descendants. He reaffirms the promise that Abram will change the world through his descendants. He reaffirms the promise that the land will belong to those descendants as well. All those promises are affirmed and are based not on something that Abram will do. Each begins with "I will" to show that the promises are based solely on the power of the Almighty God. Nothing that Abram or his descendants can do will change those promises. God has spoken. It will happen.

The promise of land was based solely on the grace and love of God. Yet, Abraham and the Jews would enjoy the land only if they were

faithful to the Lord. *"As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come."* (v.9) Circumcision was to be a sign that the people of Israel belonged to the Lord and were willing to walk with the Lord. They would enjoy the land, as in the days of David, when they were faithful to the Lord. They would find life hard when the people and their kings forgot God and worshipped idols. A great God deserved a people willing to worship Him and show Him to the world. If they did this, they would enjoy the blessings that God had in store for them as His people.

God is still great. He is still the Lord of the universe who powerfully runs the world. He is the savior of all mankind who listens to the prayers of His people. Many don't think of God that way, however. They see Him poorly because of the way that His people act in their daily lives. Jews in the Old Testament and Christians today are to live differently than the world around them. They are to be a people of character and loving kindness in an immoral and selfish world. They are to be a people that reflect their great God so that the world can see Him as He really is. When God's people forget God and become like the world, the world does not see the real God. They see someone who is no different than the world and not worth their worship or adoration.

A great God deserves great people. Most of us can think of at least one Christian whose faith shined with character and love. These were people who reflected God. We admired them and wanted to be like them. What would your world be like if the majority of Christians you knew lived with values, character and love? How would that impact the level of joy in the church, in their families and in their communities? How would it change the world's view of God? Abraham is beloved in his day and in ours because he shows the character of the Lord. As you and I walk with the Lord and live with His character, we can show Him to the world and let them see why we believe in and love our God. We can let our world know just how great our God really is.

- What is one thing that you can do today or this week to strengthen your walk with the Lord?

17 Learning God's will Gen 18:16-33

What is the purpose of prayer? Sometimes, prayers degrade into God's "to do list". We come to the drive up window of prayer and place our order. Prayer can become a place where we tell God what our needs are and what He should do about it. Sadly, I know that I could never order my parents that way and I doubt that such orders work with a Heavenly Father, either. I have found that it is better just to tell the Lord my needs and ask for His solution. Prayer becomes part of a dialogue between God and me when paired with scripture. I don't want God to do my will since I often don't have a clue what is best. I want to give God my concerns and find out what His perfect and wise will is for my life and for others. I have come to learn that prayer is a place that I learn what God is doing, not order God to do what I want.

Having told Abraham that Isaac will be born within the next year, the Lord proceeds to tell Abraham that the time has come to deal with the evil of Sodom and Gomorrah. I picture Abraham being shocked by the news, yet he has the confidence to ask a question. "*Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?*" (v.25) Abraham may have been thinking of Lot who lived in Sodom or just thinking about what this news from the Lord meant. What is amazing is that he never shies from speaking the question on his mind. He knows that the Lord will not destroy him or get angry with him for an honest question. Abraham trusts the Lord and is confident that the Lord will listen and give him an honest answer.

Abraham bases his questions for God on the knowledge that God is just and merciful. "*Far be it from you to do such a thing--to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?*" (v.25) He doesn't beg God to do anything. He doesn't claim that God can't destroy the city or claim that the city is not evil. He simply wants to understand why God is doing what He is doing. He wants to understand how bad things in Sodom are and what has led this merciful God to destroy the people that He created. Abraham knows that God always does the right thing. A shocked Abraham is trying to understand what God has planned.

As the exchange continues, Abraham knows that conversation with the Lord is a gift. He speaks to God with deep humility and with the

knowledge that it is blessing to have a God who is patient and willing to listen. "*Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes,"*" (v.27) Abraham knows that he is a man, but he has a burning need that only the Lord can help him with. Lot is down in Sodom and only the Lord can save him. As the exchange concludes, Abraham senses that the city may not even have 10 righteous people. In the conversation, God has shown Abraham how evil the cities are and why He must act.

I believe that the Lord initiated this whole conversation with Abraham as a means to teach His beloved patriarch. God revealed His plan and His reason for wanting Abraham to know (v.17-19). He could have destroyed the city without ever setting foot on earth, but He took time to teach. God teaches a lesson of mercy and justice to His servant. He let Abraham work through all the arguments and come to the realization that Sodom must be destroyed. God can and will do the same for us in our prayers. As we pray over days or weeks about an illness or a job, God often lets us work through the arguments until we know what His will is.

The Bible encourages us to pray without ceasing. Some have asked why God needs to be persuaded and why God will not help us on the first request. It is not God that needs to be persuaded, but us. Praying next to a loved one who is suffering, God needs to let us see that a gracious God may need to take them to be with Him in heaven. Praying for a job, God may need to help us to see that this is not a good opportunity for us. Extended prayer is not to persuade God, but rather a tool to teach us. There are many times in life where the purpose of prayer is to learn the "what" and "why" of God's will in our life. God does know what is best for us. Those who know the character and wisdom of God will want His will for them and not their own.

- If you could ask God any question about your life or about the future, what would you ask? What makes that question so important to you?

26 Entrusting Your Children to God Gen. 22:1-19

As a pastor, I have always felt the strain of family versus ministry. There was the birthday party that I missed because of a funeral and there was the funeral I missed because of the birth of one of my children. Most people I know face the problem of balancing work with family as well. There are weeks where we just can't help working 60 or more hours. There are also weeks where one of the kids gets sick and your job has to take second place. How does service for the Lord fit in to all of that? How do we manage the times when God calls us to put Him first as He asks you to take on a project at church or help a neighbor? Are we willing to sacrifice the things that are most important to us? Are we willing to give our precious time to God so that He can make life for us and others better?

Abraham had waited for 25 years for this son. He knew that all the promises of God depended on Isaac. If Isaac was gone, there would be no descendants as numerous as the stars and no one to inherit the land. Surely, Isaac's life was more precious to Abraham than his own life. God came to him with a command that no one wants to hear. *"Take your son, your only son, Isaac. . . sacrifice him there as a burnt offering"* (v.2) It was a test to see how much Abraham loved his God. Abraham was being asked to sacrifice the greatest thing that God had given him because he trusted the Lord. The birth of His son was a miracle from the Lord and now Abraham was being asked to put that miracle back into God's hands.

God didn't ask Abraham to take his son and sacrifice him immediately. It would have been easier to strike Isaac down quickly while you had your nerve. Abraham was called to make a long journey to the sacred mountain. It was *"on the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance."* (v.4) The three day journey gave Abraham plenty of time to turn back and refuse what must have seemed to be a cruel request. Here, there would be no wife or servants to stop him from completing the task. Here he would have to fight only his own desires as he sacrificed his son. Abraham had to make a choice to go, to climb the mountain and finally to strike his son. No one could stop or encourage him in the task. This was a test of his faith and his love for God.

In the end, he was willing to give back to the Lord the greatest gift that he received. *"Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son."* (v.10) He believed in the promises of God so much that he trusted that God would give his son back to him somehow. What God would do with the sacrifice, Abraham did not know. He could only trust God and know that his God had always loved him and would keep the promises He had made about this son. How it affected Isaac to see that his father loved God more than his own son is hard to guess. Yet, that act spoke volumes to the young patriarch about what real worship was and how important God was to their future.

Abraham was willing to give up his most precious gift, his son, to the Lord. In that moment, God changed Abraham and Isaac. Abraham saw the love of the Lord and how important both he and his future were to the Lord. Isaac saw the depth of his father's love for the Lord and had a sense of what faith in God meant. As we give our lives and the lives of our children to the Lord; they will be forever changed as well. God will bless our lives as we dedicate them to Him so that they will be productive in ways that we can not imagine. God will bless our children as we bring them to Him in faith. They will learn to respect and love the Lord as we have. He will build a lasting relationship with them and will give them character and purpose for their lives.

I imagine that the teenage Isaac walked down the mountain a different person. He had heard the voice of God, seen God's provision and seen the depth of his father's love for God. When we entrust our children to God, it changes them. They have a character and values that give them an edge in life. As parents show the depth of their faith in weekly worship and daily devotions, children set patterns that they can keep for life. When God comes before Sunday morning sports or evening television; your children will notice. The Lord becomes a greater part of their lives so that God has a greater opportunity to protect and guide them in life. Giving our greatest gift to God does not mean that we lose them. Such action entrusts our children to the care and protection of the only one who can truly help them succeed.

- What would you like your children to learn about God? How would a closer relationship with the Lord impact their life and their future?

28 A Good Marriage Gen. 23:1-19

I can't imagine life without my wife Joan. We have been married for over 35 years and have three grown children. Life would not be the same without her. I am sure that many of you feel the same about your spouse. Over the years, I have watched the tears at the funeral as someone buries their spouse. Maybe they give a final kiss or touch of the face before they close the casket on the one they love. It is obvious that there will be a hole in their lives that will never quite heal. We often feel sorrow for the spouse left behind, but we should also feel joy for the years that they had together. A strong marriage is a gift from the Lord. God intended that we have this lifelong relationship. It is God's hope that our vows at God's altar develop into a relationship lasting 50 or 60 years. It is one of the greatest gifts that the Lord can give us.

You can feel the tears on Abraham's face. "*Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her.*" (v.2) Abraham has lost his soul mate. After 127 years, she is gone. Abraham will live for 38 more years after her death (Genesis 25:7), but it will not be the same. We often tell people not to cry at a funeral, but the tears of Abraham honor his wife and show how important she was to him. She is the wife that came with him to the Palestine to claim God's promise. She is the mother of Isaac who was a miracle from God. Abraham will remarry and have additional children in his old age, but it is Sarah who he will lie by in death. A great blessing is now gone in his life.

Abraham takes pains to bury her in Palestine and not back in Ur of the Chaldees. "*Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead.*" (v.4) This is their home and their place that God has given them. Her burial in Hebron signaled Abraham's faith in the promise that the Lord had given this land to their descendants. She should be buried here where her family would live for centuries. She should be buried here so that others of her family could join her when they die. Over the years, that came to be reality. The cave where Sarah was buried in Hebron would also contain the bodies of Abraham, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob and Leah. While Abraham would have to buy a place to bury Sarah, he believed that this would be their home. Sarah's tomb would become beach head for the future. The tomb was an act of faith claiming God's promise for himself and his family.

Nothing is too good for Sarah. Abraham has his eye on the cave of Machpelah and the field that goes with it. Nothing else will do. "*Intercede with Ephron son of Zohar on my behalf so he will sell me the cave of Machpelah which belongs to him.*" (v.8-9) Arriving at a final price for a piece of property usually involved a great deal of bargaining. Yet, Abraham calmly announces what he wants and that he will pay full price for the land. One would expect shrewdness, but Sarah had been so precious to Abraham that he wanted the best for her. He agrees to buy both the cave and the field even before Ephron names the price. His concern is not to get a good deal, but to honor his wife. He seals the deal by paying the 400 shekels of silver in the presence of the witnesses. The cave would belong to Sarah no matter what the price.

Marriages often are taken for granted only to be empty in our later years of life. We focus on raising our children or working at our careers. When the children move out, two strangers find that they barely know each other. We struggle to recapture the magic that we once had. We feel empty and feel like life just isn't what it used to be. Such is the power of marriage. A strong marriage is a joy for a couple every day. It provides a friend who we enjoy traveling with, having hobbies with or just sitting and watching the sunsets together. A weak marriage is a daily grind where two people push and shove for dominance and often avoid each other. The picture of Abraham and Sarah is God's hope for all of us. He wants us to have that joy.

No matter how strong or weak your marriage, think of what it would have been like to have Abraham and Sarah's marriage. Think of being so close to your spouse that you shed the tears of Abraham at his or her funeral. The joy that such a marriage gives is priceless. It is God's gift of a friend, a partner, and a helper in life. It is never too late. Court your spouse again. Carve out time for just the two of you whether you have children at home or not so that you can know each other and talk at a deeper level. As you support and spend time with them, you can change the quality of your life and of your legacy.

- What can you learn from Abraham about love in marriage? What is one thing you can do to show your love for your spouse today?

Final thoughts

Our temptation with the life of Abraham is to see the finished product and think that we could never be like him. The story of the Bible shows a very different scenario. Here is a man taken from obscurity and polished by the Lord. If you look at the real man, you will see a man who failed several times. He only becomes the man of God that we honor under the tutelage and testing of a God who loves him. The Bible doesn't hide his failures, but shows us the whole story so that we can follow the journey of Abraham and become a man or woman of God like him.

If you open up your life to the stories of the Bible, God will instruct you so that you can be a person of faith and blessing. Follow the Lord, as Abraham does, so that you might have his blessing and so that you might be a blessing to others. Don't get discouraged by your failures, but seek to learn from them. Each of these devotions contains a lesson for you from the life of Abram. Follow the struggles and victories of Abraham from the Biblical account and seek to put those lessons into your own life. For the rest of the devotions, you may buy the full book on Amazon kindle. May the Lord bless you as Abraham's life story has blessed me.

About the author

Rev. Mark Etter has been a pastor for thirty years and is currently the pastor of Bethany Lutheran Church in Erlanger, KY. Rev. Etter has published several books of Adult Bible studies and numerous devotions and youth studies with Concordia Publishing House in St. Louis. He is a certified pastoral coach for Coach Advance of Cleveland, OH and has served in several capacities like LWML counselor, evangelism chairman, and circuit counselor for the larger church. He and his wife, Joan, have three grown children.

His life goal has been to bring people closer to Christ by the power of the stories and teachings of the Bible. He enjoys seeing people discover how great our God really is so that they can love God and live in God's blessings. He wants every person to be in the Word so that they see and enjoy God's plan for their lives as well as live in the forgiveness that comes from the cross of Jesus Christ. God's Word has the power to change lives and to provide the answers that people so often long for. It is his prayer that these devotions will bring you closer to God so you may know

how much God truly loves you and wants to mold you into someone special.

Chronology of Abraham

Biblical Event	Bible Ref.	Abraham Age	Isaac Age	
Entrance into Canaan	12:4	75		
Ishmael is born	16:3	86		
Isaac born	21:5	100	0	
Abraham offers his son on Mt. Moriah	22	115?	15?	
Sarah dies	23:1	137	37	
Isaac marries Rebekah	25:20	140	40	
Jacob and Esau are born	25:26	160	60	
Abraham dies	25:7	175	75	

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