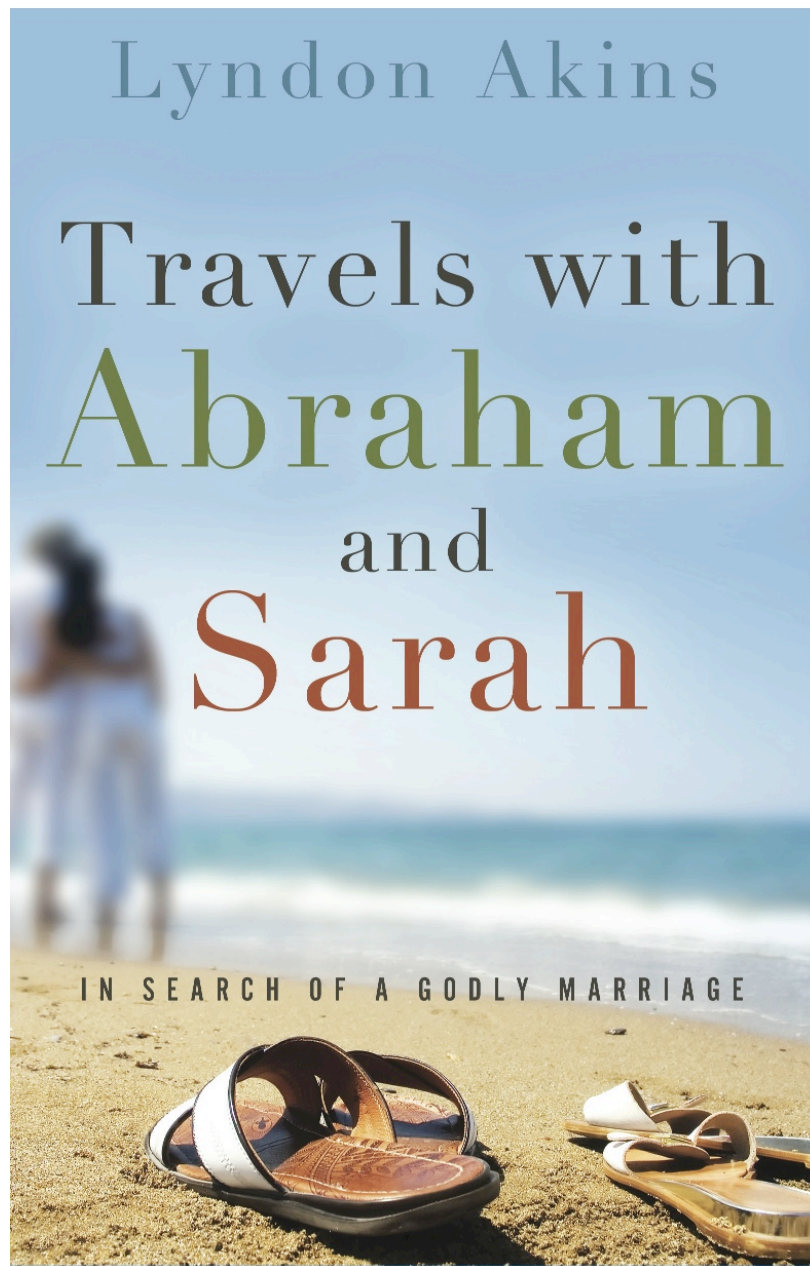


Small Group Study Guide



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Introduction:

Just as Abraham and Sarah discovered a Godly marriage during their journey, we too share in the opportunity to grow closer as a couple and closer to God. Marriage is not a destination instead it is the threshold to a life long journey. My book was designed to introduce you to theological concepts of marriage and then illustrate how God's design played out in the marriage of Abraham and Sarah. This small group study guide is designed to take you deeper into the journey and promote practical application of God's design into in your relationship. I also hope it challenges you to interact with the material from the book. If you agree or disagree with the material presented, then your response should be followed with; "Why do I think and feel that way?" Many of us have built belief systems that are cobbled together like a brick road. Maybe you have seen those historic streets at various tourist locations? They are bumpy, uneven and in spots the bricks are loose or missing. This study guide will challenge you to develop a firm foundation of your belief system, and that will result in a healthier marriage and relationship with God.

Small groups are a great Christian dynamic and in many places they have taken the place of the traditional Sunday school hour or they augment traditional church programs. The small group provides an intimate setting for discussion and relationship building. The questions in this book are intimate by design. Therefore I have broken them into sections for the group or for the couple only. You may select to use all the questions in a group format, but don't forget that some members of your group may not be ready to be fully transparent with in a group setting. Small group ministries are a special dynamic, but they also require trust between all members and that takes time. Additionally, never forget that small group meetings are confidential and conversations are not to be shared outside the group.

Planning a Small Group Meeting:

Here are a few of the essential elements needed for a small group meeting. This is not an exhaustive list, but it is a good start.

1. Leadership: If possible, select a couple that you regard as spiritually/biblically mature. Their guidance will help you avoid the potholes of "feelings theology" and remain focused on God's Word.
2. Location: Don't expect the leaders to also provide the meeting place. Any couple can host the event and many successful groups have found that taking turns at different homes allows everyone ownership in the group.
3. Food: Some couples do meals before study and others simply provide snacks. Since your goal is to share and learn in God's Word, I suggest that you limit food "administration". We have been a part of small groups that allow food

preparation and presentation to overshadow participation. Keep it simple and in the long run you'll host a more meaningful event.

4. **Time:** Start on time, watch your time and end on time. There are always couples that are late, like to drift in the conversation and don't know when to go home. This is a small group meeting and to be respectful of people's workweek, babysitters and drive time, you should find ways to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of your meeting time together.
5. **Size:** The larger the group the harder it will be for everyone to participate. Six to eight individuals per groups are ideal. If your group is too small, you can always add a couple. But you cannot easily reduce the size of a meeting without hurting feelings and alienating the very people who may need this study the most.
6. **Spiritual Growth:** How will you know that God is working in your small group and in the lives of each couple? Well, you won't likely know the intimate details of a couple's lives regardless of how "safe" everyone feels about sharing their weekly story. Spiritual growth occurs many ways but one noticeable way is when one couple realizes that they are ready to lead and mentor other small groups. One goal your group may want to consider is that of reproduction. Reproducing more small groups and impacting people for Christ, illustrates fruitfulness.
7. **Journal:** In order to keep this document small and easy to download, I have intentionally limited the whitespace needed for recording your answers. I suggest that you get an inexpensive notebook to record your answers. Record your thoughts, motivational passages, prayers and how God answers your heart's desire. It is a great way to track your spiritual growth and God's activity in your life.

I appreciate your including my book in your marriage journey. This study guide was developed in response to those who contacted me asking for a small group resource. If you find additional ways that this guide can glorify God and bless others through, please email me your comments.

May God richly bless your marriage!

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1. The Journey Map

Although Abraham and Sarah are the marriage pioneers that we focus upon in this study, God was deliberate in His design “from the beginning”. Before sin and the fall of Adam and Eve, marriage was perfect and without flaw. Each partner in the marriage knew and loved their role, and they enjoyed an intimate relationship with God. Sin changed what God desired and both Abraham and Sarah, and subsequent marriage partners must navigate a fallen world on the journey toward a godly marriage.

Read Genesis 1:26-31 and 2:18-25: then discuss the following questions.

1. Culture, law, politicians and special interest groups are trying to define and redefine the original purpose of marriage. After reading the Scripture selection please write in your own words how the Bible records God’s designed marriage, or simply list the elements that speak to your heart:
2. God ordained marriage between a man and woman. How are we as Christians to respond to the world’s definition of marriage?
3. God wants to be an intimate part of your marriage. In your own words, what kind of relationship does God want with you individually and corporately with your spouse?
 - a. COUPLES ONLY: So how are you doing in including God in your life and marriage? Are there desires, agendas and things that are getting in the way of your ability to enjoy a deeper knowledge and relationship with Christ? (List the “idols” that you believe may interfering with your spouse’s relationship with God. Gracefully share your list with one another.)
4. The world wants us to believe that following the teaching of Christ will lead to financial famine. The Bible indicates that God has a specific and deliberate plan for his children. Some people are wealthy where others have meager financial means. So what do you believe about the journey God wants you and your spouse to take?
5. God had a gift in mind for Abraham and Sarah. God has a gift in mind for your marriage too! The challenge we face is that we are too often comparing our gifts with the gifts of others, or we don’t like the gifts that God offers. Read John 21:15-25 and describe how Christ answered that dilemma posed by his disciple Peter:

- a. What gift/blessing is God offering you and your spouse, but you are reluctant to accept the gift?

Chapter 1 Journal Assignment:

Record your concerns and hopes for or about your marriage. Then record what you would like to accomplish through this small group study.

Chapter 1 Prayer Assignment:

Pray that God will identify in your heart and mind the areas in your life and marriage that are limiting His relationship with you and your relationship with your spouse. Then close your prayer praising God for the gift of marriage you are enjoying and for the gift of your spouse.

2. God's Road Signs

When I was a boy our family would visit the local service station and pick up a map and begin planning for our summer vacation. Now I key in the address and push “go” on my GPS and the electronic voice begins telling me directions. I have a general idea of the direction but I seldom look at a map to get the “big picture” of my journey. I allow the four-inch screen to provide my vision, which is actually not very discerning. Maybe you have experienced a time when the GPS map isn't updated with the road construction changes or the satellite feed gets obscured. That is when we begin checking the glove box for a map or seek a roadside station for directions.

God's plan for marriage was specific and intentional, yet we often approach our relationships as though we have a built-in marriage GPS or roadmap. Abraham and Sarah were not born with a God-given instinct on how to be married, but we don't have to make the same mistakes and detours if we review God's initial design for marriage.

1. We plan and research our education, career development, and purchases for cars and houses in hopes we will make the correct decisions. Describe the process and amount of time you have invested in creating a plan for a godly marriage:
2. God states that the man and woman are to come together as “one-flesh”. Many people assume that only addresses sexual relations. If that were solely the case, those who have had sexual relations with multiple partners would be one flesh with many people. Yet the gift of sexual union does bring about an intensity of feelings that reflect a one-flesh union. That union creates a healthy tension with married couples but an unhealthy tension with unmarried couples.
 - a. Do you agree or disagree and why?
 - b. In what other way can a man and woman become one-flesh where sex is not the leading element of the relationship?
3. God created the marriage design, but Satan had other plans. He was intent on destroying God's creation because Satan cannot destroy God.
 - a. Why is Satan unable to destroy God?
 - b. Why is Satan so focused upon the destruction of the family?
 - c. In what ways have you experienced an attack upon your marriage?

4. Abraham and Sarah journeyed in a fallen and sinful world like ours. It was not as complicated and technologically advanced, but they share our contemporary issues of the heart. The book states that they dealt with love, jealousy, loneliness, hurt, disappointment, infertility, sinful decisions and deception. They also encountered others that wanted to destroy them.
 - a. Based on the challenges that Abraham and Sarah faced, which one(s) challenge you and why?
 - b. What elements of culture or expectations of family, society and friends challenge your marriage?

5. God wanted all couples to have a “Velcro-marriage”. In your own words, how would you describe that kind of relationship?
 - a. How did God plan for man and woman to achieve that kind of relationship?
 - b. COUPLES ONLY: When you evaluate your marriage, in what ways does your marriage feel like Velcro and in what areas do you wish it felt like Velcro?

Chapter 2 Journal Assignment

Record the ways that your spouse encourages the concept of a “velcro-marriage” relationship. What ways can you become more supportive of the concept “one flesh” in your relationship.

Chapter 2 Prayer Assignment

Begin by thanking God for the road signs and instructions the Bible has provided for attaining a Godly marriage. Spend your prayer time listing all the ways that you have experienced a relationship of one flesh with your spouse. Then pray God’s blessing on your spouse. Finish by asking God to identify ways in which you can be more aware of the ways you can love God more and your spouse more.

3. God's Promise

Culture, pagan religion, family and friends influenced Abraham and Sarah's marriage. Their only insight as to how to have a meaningful relationship was by watching relationships around them. (Sound familiar?) This book argues that God has provided intentional instructions for marriage and to have a godly marriage we should follow God's instruction. Yet, if we are going to follow the teaching of the Bible then we find ourselves with a dilemma. Culture, family, media, teachers and friends influence our knowledge and belief of God. The world is telling us that creation and the world is a cosmic accident, which is a contradiction of the Bible. Evolution tells us that things happened accidentally, in addition our having to ignore major gaps of information. We therefore find ourselves picking and choosing the elements of the Bible to believe, ignore or reject. The world tells us that the creation story cannot be true. Yet, we are to believe that an infertile half brother and sister were to be used by God to build a nation? That God rescues them from mistakes, and prevents Abraham from killing his son Isaac? If we believe miraculous events in the life of Abraham and Sarah, why do we question God's creation? As Christians we believe that God has a plan and promise for our lives, but we also are pressured to believe that life came about by chance. Before you can believe God wants to change your life and that He has a plan for your marriage relationship, you have to have a meaningful theology and faith about God's Word.

Abraham and Sarah encountered God in a miraculous way and they were so rocked by the introduction that they abandoned a generational way of life and began a new journey with God. The intention of this section is to question the presuppositions you have about God, and challenge you to seek God and His truth – not the world's version of truth.

1. When you read that Abraham and Sarah were half brother and sister, did that concept bother you? How would you explain that situation to a non-believer?
2. What do you know is true and proven about evolution? What part of your belief is based upon faith?
3. What do you know is true and proven about creation? What part of your belief is based upon faith?
4. If the world and humans were made by chance, then why is God so specific in His descriptions and instructions with Abraham and Sarah? If the complexity of creation and humanity can be trusted to chance, why can't we trust our marriages to chance? Is there a way we trust our salvation to chance?
5. What elements of your marriage have you left to chance?

6. Name three ways that your belief in evolution or creation impacts your marriage:
7. COUPLES ONLY: God gave Abraham and Sarah, a hopeless couple, an unbelievable promise that came true. Christ's birth, purpose for His death and His resurrection are unbelievable, but true! Each event occurred and is critical to the Christian faith. The transformation of your life and marriage begins with faith. Abraham and Sarah could have never received God's promise if they had not followed Him in faith. What areas of your life are weak in faith?

Chapter 3 Journal Assignment

This week record your thoughts and feelings about this chapter. What areas do you disagree and why? What areas do you agree with and why? Do you have conflicts in your belief system?

Chapter 3 Prayer Assignment

Praise God for his creation and list some of those blessings in your life. Ask God to open your heart and mind to His truth and to show you areas in your life that are lacking in faith.

4. Walking in Desire

We recently had some friends who were transferred from Atlanta to New York for a new job. Unfortunately, the job offer came in the middle of their children's school year. It was a difficult decision for the parents because their children yearned to wait until next fall before they transferred schools. The children had made commitments to teams and had carefully laid plans for parties, sleepovers and their year-end GPA. But in the end no other decision could be made, and they departed for a new home and future after the Christmas break.

Leaving the known and comfortable places, people and things is frightening and hard work. We have expectations and plans in process and we would prefer that God would come along side and affirm our well-laid plans.

Abram and Sarai lived in the well-worn rut of hometown, family and friends. They had plans and desires for their future and desperately wanted a child. God was able to get their attention and convince them to put away the comfortable house slippers of life and put on their traveling shoes. He knew their limitations, but he also knew who they could become through Him and He knew the desires of their heart.

In Ancient times God would speak to His people in dreams, visions or through His representatives. They lived in a cluttered world of pagan noise, expectations and the stress of earning a living. We don't know the means of God's communication to Abram and Sarai, but we know it worked and they stepped forward in faith.

1. We live in a confusing and noisy society. TV, billboards, computers, cell-phones and public address systems are vying for our attention. God speaks to us through His World, Ways, People and Word. How are you preparing yourself to hear God's message? In what ways do you daily, actively listen for God's direction in your life?
2. Abram and Sarai's hearts were burning for a child. God knew that they were an infertile couple, mature in years and weak in faith. But he could use their desire in His plan for building a nation of God. What unspoken desire lingers in your heart that you believe God could use for His glory?
 - a. How many options are you offering God for fulfilling that desire? Are you open to God's leading or are you looking for Him to affirm and provide for your desire and self-made plans?

3. God often uses the desires of our heart to fulfill his plans, but at times our plans can get in the way. But that doesn't mean that we are to be passive in our pursuit of God! In the book there is a phrase "you can't steer a donkey cart unless it is moving." How does that apply to Abram and Sarai's relationship with God... and your relationship with God?
4. There is relationship between God and man in our faith walk. In many ways it is a mystery, but in other ways it seems as though we are to be dance partners and God our instructor. I am not a good dancer but hopefully you are! What are some of the dynamic elements between the dancers and the instructor that can guide us into a better rhythm with God and with one another?
5. "So Abram went forth..." Based upon their background, experiences and circumstances, how hard do you think it was for this couple to begin to follow God? How hard has it been for you based upon your background, experiences and circumstances? What part of your walk has been in doubt?

Chapter 4 Journal Assignment

This week record the times you have heard God's will in your life and compare them to those times you have desired to hear God's will but have not heard Him. Consider your circumstances during those times. Did fear, uncertainty, comfort and desire play a part in your communications with God?

Chapter 4 Prayer Assignment

This is your chance to ask God to evaluate your motives, fears and desires. Ask Him to help you recognize desires that glorify, from motives and fears that negatively impact your walk with Him. Then ask God specifically where He is leading and pray for the courage to begin following when you aren't really certain where you're being lead. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you in a dance with your Creator!

5. Healthy Boundaries

God told Abram and Sarah to leave their homeland, friends and family. God's call on Abram and Sarai's life required that they depart from the well-worn ruts of life. Every step they took led them farther away from the known into the unknown. It built their faith in God and their trust in one another. Moving out of the ruts forces you to awaken yourself to every aspect of your environment and to God. You may not have the ability to leave your homeland because of career or personal limitations. You may also be far beyond the "newlywed stage", so this may be your opportunity to share your struggles with newlywed travelers. Regardless of your age or marital state, God wants you to check your boundaries. How you act and respond in the world impacts your relationships with others and God. In turn what you do becomes a part of your Christian witness. Let's discuss these concepts further.

1. Think about your day, week and month and make a list of the ruts in your life. Not all ruts are negative in fact some are rather comfortable. Even going to church and sitting in the same pew can become a rut, so think about every element of your life while making the list.
2. The book's definition of marriage boundaries is; "how your marriage will operate". This definition can also extend to your life in "how your Christian witness will operate in this world".
 - a. In what ways do you live your life that is "set apart" from the way the world lives?
 - b. In what ways do you live that would seem identical to the way the world lives?
 - c. Are there areas that you have identified that need to move from question B to question A?
3. What is your boundary for how you spend your money and how you invest God's money in ministry and para-ministry organizations? How did you determine the amount? Is it enough?
4. The book discusses the boundary of one's spiritual life. We need someone who will encourage and teach us (Paul) and someone we will encourage and mentor (Timothy). Who is the "Paul" and "Timothy" in your life? If you don't

have those kinds of relationships, are you interested – why or why not?

5. Prayer is essential for your individual development and relationship development between you, your spouse and God. Describe your prayer relationship with your spouse, or indicate how you will begin this exercise.
6. Service is the overflowing of God's gifts into your life that you share with others. List your areas of service. If you don't have any service, list the areas that you feel you have giftedness.
 - a. If you don't have areas of service or don't feel like you are specifically gifted, are there ministries in your church that simply need willing hands, feet and prayers in which you could participate? List them.
7. Intentional living requires a plan, or your life becomes wishful thinking or a series of unnecessary detours. Take a look at the list in the appendix and discuss each topic with your spouse and record your thoughts for the following month and year. The more you discuss, plan and pray for God's direction, the more He will bless you with opportunity and significance in each category.

Chapter 5 Journal Assignment

Begin to record the ways you are using your time, talent and treasure. Think about your life in the past 5 years then 10 years. Are you seeing a trend of growth, static or decline in service to God? Let me warn you that it is hard to stay the same. Typically we are either growing or losing, but seldom are we able to maintain our service positions.

Chapter 5 Prayer Assignment

Before you complete any of these soul-searching exercises I want you to bathe your heart and mind in prayer. Record those prayers in your journal. You and your spouse must be asking yourselves the really tough questions about your Christian boundaries. We all have agendas of how we think each question or category should be answered, but ask God for direction and that He test your agenda against His desires for your life. God answers prayer when you submit yourself to His will and live as He intended.

6. A Home of Their Own

This section addresses the emotions of the family dynamic. As stated earlier in the book, God did not ask Abram and Sarai to build walls that kept them away from impacting others, instead he ask that they obey and follow His way of living and avoid the ways of the pagan culture.

When Terry and I were teaching this marriage series, we devoted one Sunday to a “marriage panel”. We were one of three couples on the panel because we had been married 25 years. The other couples were married 15 and 50 years. Our audience had been married from one to five years. I expected the couple married 15 years would get the majority of the questions, but it was the couple of 50 years. They approached the subject of healthy boundaries from what they “wished their friends and family had known when they were newlyweds, and from the mistakes they had made as parents.” Now as grandparents they were taking their own advice and encouraging our young couples to set godly boundaries for their family and friends.

When we get married we not only take our parents old furniture to start housekeeping, we sometimes take some of their emotional baggage and practices. God calls us to leave our mother and father and cling to one another and to Him. So, let’s discuss some of the family dynamic that you may be experiencing or if you have married children, the dynamic that you may be leading.

1. The book suggests that young couples avoid the “bank of mom and dad” and learn to budget, save, and work hard. Discuss the concept of the “bank of mom and dad” and list the pros and cons of this concept. Are there times when the family bank may be necessary?
2. How do you and your spouse handle arguments? How did things work out when you involved a third party as a parent or friend in the discussion?
3. How did your family create its traditions? Was there conflict and is there conflict that still needs to be addressed?
4. Has there been a time that you or your spouse should have stepped into a situation to avoid a potentially unsafe relationship? Are you in a situation now where you need your spouse’s protection and leadership?
5. The book discusses the temptation to be the “family chaplain” and the “powdered butt syndrome”. Do you agree or disagree with the advice? Why or why not.

6. Finding friends as a couple can be more difficult than when you were single. Describe how you have overcome this situation and made new “couple friends”.

Chapter 6 Journal Assignment

Record how God has helped you with your family and friends relationships. Next list the areas of concern with family and friend relationships and record the areas you need God’s discernment, wisdom and love with those challenges.

Chapter 6 Prayer Assignment

Pray for your extended family and friends. Ask God to bless and prosper them and that they have a personal and meaningful relationship with Christ. Ask God to place godly people in the path of your loved ones. Pray specifically for the salvation of those who are lost.

7. Just Do...God's Will

“What is God’s will for my life? What does He want me to do and when? If only I could hear God’s voice, or even receive a post-it note with some directions.” Do those comments sound familiar? Abram and Sarai received specific directions about their departure and a future promise, but they were uncertain of their destination and the time frame. Since we know the end of their story their step in faith may seem less than dramatic. But in leaving their family, friends and homeland they were rejecting everything they had ever known to follow an unknown God to an uncertain destination.

There is a mystery and adventure in the human and divine interaction. God invites us to be a part of His plan! He desires that we have a hands-on experience with Him. If this were a Hollywood movie we would be excited and willing to swipe our credit card for a ticket. But the difference between the movie, and even the Bible story is that neither requires an ounce of faith from us. Faith my friend is the key and faith isn’t wishful thinking, it comes from the knowledge gained from a hands-on experience with God and His Word.

1. The book discusses the concept of God rewarding our willingness to use the faith that we have and trusting Him during uncertain times. Can you think of Bible stories where this concept was proven? Describe a time in your life where you walked in faith although you were uncertain of your journey.
2. Abram and Sarai lived in a livestock and agriculture driven economy ravaged by a famine. Seeking Egyptian supplies would be a reasonable solution. How did an economic crisis test Abram and Sarai’s character?
 - a. Why did Abram lie about his relationship with Sarai?
 - b. Why did Sarai go along with the lie?
 - c. Was she acting as the “helper” that God desired for a wife? Why or why not.
 - d. In light of God’s design of marriage in Genesis, read Ephesians 5:21 and apply the Scripture to this situation and describe how Abram and Sarai should have responded.
3. Abram encountered a crisis with his finances and faith. Those issues intersected with a pagan ruler who thought he was a god.

- a. In their encounter with God, who showed greater understanding of God and appropriate reaction: Abram or Pharaoh?
 - b. Abram and Sarai had an opportunity to witness in a pagan land during their economic crisis. Describe the effectiveness of their witness.
 - c. Can you think of a time you allowed fear to drive your decisions? How did it impact your witness?
 - d. Based on what Pharaoh expressed, what would be his perspective on Abram and Sarai's God? What would be his perspective of their faith in God?
4. Abram and Sarai tried to fix a difficult situation by themselves and created a circumstance that jeopardized the nation God was trying to build. How did their lack of faith work against God's will?
- a. How did God deal with the situation with Pharaoh?
 - b. How did God deal with Abram and Sarai?
 - c. When your spouse made mistakes, have you responded as God responds or in another way?
 - d. Why do you think God selected such an unlikely couple for such an important mission?

Chapter 7 Journal Assignment

Record the crisis or "famine" that you or a family member is currently facing. Describe your fears and weaknesses, and at times the lack of faith that plagues you. Have you been in this situation before and seen God deliver you? Then think about His earlier provision and how you can trust Him. If you are uncertain, describe how Abram and Sarai were delivered. List the Scripture passages that speak to your heart at this time.

Chapter 7 Prayer Assignment

Now is the time to lift up your fears, weaknesses, lack of faith and need for provision from God. Ask Him how you are to respond in a fallen world when your needs seem so grave. Ask God to provide you the wisdom, courage and discernment for each day as you travel in your famine. Don't forget to thank Him for the ultimate provision of eternal life through the grace of Jesus and forgiveness of sins. Lift up the needs of your Christian family. Praise God that He is faithful!

8. Speed Bumps

I don't like speed bumps because my car sits low to the ground and they sometimes scrape my undercarriage. Then again I sometimes drive too fast. I don't see the speed limit sign or the pedestrian crossing sign. So those nasty speed bumps slow me down. They keep me from getting ahead of myself and maybe causing a dangerous situation. Do you ever get ahead of God and try to fix things yourself only to make things worse? That is the topic we will focus on in this chapter. Abram and Sarai had a few speed bumps that only frustrated them. They did not slow down and wait on God, instead they got ahead of Him. They begin to evaluate their circumstances in light of God's promise. Maybe God had forgotten, they had misunderstood Him, or God just needs a little nudge.

We all have prayers and expectations of God in how and when He will answer our prayers. Abram and Sarai had waited forty years in a pagan land and they were ready for an answered prayer. In our drive-thru world it is easy to get impatient with God. Let's see what we can learn from Abram and Sarai's experience.

1. Sarai was medically barren and was physically too old to bear a child. The inability to produce a child was viewed negatively in that ancient culture. Women were treated as though they were under a curse. What were some of the culturally acceptable practices during their era of producing offspring?
 - a. In what ways does the word barren mean, "Not ready"? In what ways were Abram & Sarai not ready for God's provision?
2. What are some of the modern solutions to infertility? As Christians should we consider any of those methods questionable or should we apply all options?
 - a. What is a practical way that an infertile couple should approach the problem? Should they have some non-negotiable in mind before they begin the process? Why is having a plan in mind before selecting a solution important?
3. Although God allows certain things to occur, that does not mean that He affirms our solutions. Although Hagar provided a benefit for Abram and Sarai, in what ways did the solution become a curse?
 - a. How did regret, blame and sin cause strife in their marriage?
4. Hagar's attitude changed once she became pregnant with Abram's child. How would you describe her expectations and attitude?

- a. How did Sarai and Abram relate to one another?
 - b. How did God respond to Hagar?
 - c. How did God respond to Abram & Sarai?
5. How did the circumstances of peer pressure, infertility, and frustration impact Abram and Sarai's understanding and belief in God and His promises?
- a. How do we avoid making the wrong decision when our surroundings or circumstances lead us to believe that God has forgotten or that we need to take control?

Chapter 8 Journal Assignment

Record those issues that are pressing in your mind and heart and you're hearing the words in your head "time is running out". Record the ways in which you are pursuing God's provision. List the godly people who have given counsel, the Scripture foundation you are using, and the possible solutions that could be used for your decisions. Do you need a speed bump to slow you down or are your emotions and desires in control and the problem in God's hand? Describe.

Chapter 8 Prayer Assignment

A Prayer for patience and discernment:

"Lord God, enable me to be strong and of good courage, may I not fear nor be afraid: Lord you are the One who goes with me. You promise not to leave or forsake me. You go before me and will be with me so I do not fear nor am I dismayed. In your presence I know Your power, peace, guidance, protection and love. Calm my anxious heart. Thank You God. Amen."

9. Growth through Detours

We have a GPS and I love its ability to navigate confusing roads and it tells me when and where to turn. It has a woman's voice and we call her "Gertie – the Garmin". I'm convinced that a GPS can bring harmony to a marriage because when you make a wrong turn then you can just blame that dumb machine and not your spouse!

Gertie does a great job of checking on my current location and preparing me for the next turn. Unfortunately, there are times that traffic hampers my ability to be prepared for a turn and I miss the mark. That is when Gertie speaks those sweet and reassuring words "recalculating".

There are times that we can get off track from God, we sin and miss the mark. Yet we are forgiven and God looks for us to admit our mistakes and realign our hearts and direction with Him. When you pray for God's direction and for His will in your life, your "Amen" is just like saying, "recalculating". That is the time you are telling God that you want to be aligned with His will and that you need his direction and discernment to turn your fleshly heart back to Him.

What would happen if we doubted God and second-guessed His directions? It would be like my doubting Gertie and deciding to figure out the course myself. I would end up taking a lot of unnecessary detours. That happened with Abram and Sarai and one day God said, "recalculating". He decided to change their names!

1. God told Abram and Sarai that he would give them a baby although they were age 100 and 90. They laughed at the prospect of God's gracious gift. Sarai even denied laughing. Why do you suppose they laughed at the Creator of the Universe's comment?
 - a. Is there a desire in your heart that would make you laugh if God were to answer that prayer? Why would you laugh?
2. The book discusses the concept of circumcision and its purpose in Abram's life and his relationship with God. In your own words, how do you explain the concept?
 - a. Christians speak of a circumcision of the heart. Read Romans 2:29 and discuss that concept.

- b. Circumcision also reflects a total and permanent commitment. How should that level of commitment be reflected in the marriage commitment?
- 3. COUPLES ONLY: Discuss the issue, item, dream or agenda that you need to circumcise in your marriage so that you can enjoy the commitment for each other that God desires for you.
- 4. The book states “Today, marriage has become too much of a negotiated contract that has loopholes and exit strategies.”
 - a. What are some of the loopholes and exit strategies we see for marriage today?
 - b. Of the exit strategies, which are biblical? (Identify and discuss the verses you discover that support your answer)
- 5. Why did God change Abram and Sarai’s name?
 - a. When did the change occur in Abraham’s heart?
 - b. When you became a Christian, your name did not change but your identity changed. How does God view you during the period before you are fully perfected?
 - c. What exit strategy or loophole did Christ use in fulfilling the will of His Father? Jesus said there was a loophole for marriage, but why did God allow that to occur? (See Matthew 19:8)

Chapter 9 Journal Assignment

For years Abram and Sarah thought Ishmael was their chosen son, but God set the record straight that Sarah would give birth to a son. It was hard for them to let go of what they thought God had provided. Is there an “Ishmael” in your life that you thought was God’s best provision, but He is actually asking you to let go?

Chapter 9 Prayer Assignment

Praise God for the gift of Christ Jesus in your life! We should be laughing with joy that He took our place. If we never received another answered prayer, wouldn’t forgiveness, restoration and a “new name” be enough? This week spend your time praising God for answered prayers, grace filled surprises and a loving spouse. Pray that God will bless and strengthen your marriage. Give thanks for your spouse and lift up their prayer requests to your Heavenly Father.

10. Finishing Strong

The book discusses a building project that required a demolition of the old house and a rebuilding of the new house. The key element was the need for a strong, straight and level foundation. This is exactly what we need in our relationships with our spouse and God.

God began building in Abraham and Sarah a foundation of godliness the moment they began their journey away from Ur of the Chaldeans. Their walk of faith was progressive in God's eyes and to those in their community. Their accomplishment of growing in faith wasn't measured by personal achievement, but instead, it was measured by their willingness to allow God to work through them.

When I told a friend I had written a book on Abraham and Sarah, his first response was, "Isn't that the guy who God told to kill his son?" Yes that is true, but God didn't ask Abraham to do anymore than He was willing to do through His son Jesus Christ. Salvation came through a sacrifice and the substitution of Another.

1. Abraham got up the early to pursue the difficult task that lay before him. What elements from the story indicate that Abraham was under a great deal of stress?
 - a. What example can Christians learn from Abraham in how he prepared for the journey with Isaac?
 - b. Describe the attitude and spirit of Isaac during this event.
 - c. The Abram of the past and the Abraham on the day he was to sacrifice Isaac were like two different men. What differences do you recognize? What differences do you see in yourself and your mate based upon their relationship with Jesus?
2. Abraham raised a tool of death and began to plunge it into the heart of his only son Isaac. An Angel of the Lord seized his arm at just the right moment. What does this situation say about God's timing and His feeling toward man's commitment to obey Him?
 - a. God stated, "Now I know...." Was God uncertain of Abraham's actions?
 - b. How does God's intimate knowledge of man reflect the kind of relationship needed in a marriage?
 - c. In what ways do we today idolize our children and grandchildren as Abraham and Sarah idolized Isaac?

- d. When you review the story of Abraham and Sarah receiving Isaac from God and their willingness to sacrifice him, and God's salvation of Isaac; what overall theme do you see emerging about God's will, provision and grace?
3. Abraham and Sarah's trust, submission and commitment to God are reasons why they were chosen to be the parents of a nation of God.
 - a. What would your marriage look like if your mutual devotion to God and to your spouse equaled that of this story?
 - b. What kind of man, father and husband did Abraham become?
 - c. What kind of woman mother and wife did Sarah become?
 - d. What elements of their walk with God should we be following in our marriage?
 4. How would you describe Abraham's faith in God's provision and plans for Isaac?

Chapter 10 Journal Assignment

Record the thoughts, habits and attitudes that you possess that God may be asking you to sacrifice so that you can have a deeper relationship with Him. Discuss with your spouse the things that they see is hampering the ability to have a deeper marriage relationship.

Chapter 10 Prayer Assignment

Pray over your family, spouse, children and friends. Ask that God grant them wisdom, courage and discernment in a harsh and fallen world. If they are unsaved, pray for their salvation. Ask God to show you ways that you could show Christ to the lost, greater support a ministry need, volunteer to support a church need, or witness to someone who needs a friend in Jesus.

Conclusion

The concluding chapter of the book provides a brief overview of God's timeless truths as reflected in the story of Abraham and Sarah. They are more than Bible icons; they were real people who had challenging circumstances and were greatly blessed by God.

After your final last small group meeting, what will you do with this material? How will the story of God and his chosen couple Abraham and Sarah impact the way you live your life and conduct your marriage?

God is looking for couples that will stand firm and make a difference in this world on His behalf. Our goal should be to keep the fire of passion burning in our relationship with Jesus and our spouse. So if someone were to ask, "how is your godly marriage journey" working out for you? How will you respond?

About the Author

Lyndon Akins (Lyn) is a Senior Vice President with Aon Integramark in Atlanta. In 2009 he received a Master of Divinity Degree from Luther Rice University, and is an ordained minister at Dunwoody Baptist Church. Lyn and his wife Terry are graduates of the University of Tennessee in Knoxville and were married in 1985. After living in Winston-Salem, NC for six years they currently reside in Atlanta with their daughter Anna who attends Marist High School. The Akins family enjoys spending time with their new Labrador puppy Daisy, and they are members and teachers at Dunwoody Baptist Church. Weekly podcasts and teaching notes from his material are available at www.ahigherplace.net or podcasts can be downloaded from iTunes*. Lyn can be contacted via email at akins.lyn@gmail.com.

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