

Lessons from Abraham

Stay Young

Are You Really as Young as You Feel?

Since I have passed middle age, I have come up against several milestones. Yet I felt like I was much younger than I was, perhaps because we are exactly the same person we were when we were seventeen, we don't feel so much the stretch of aging, at least within our sense of self. It was me who bought a Credence Clearwater Revival record and not a younger version of me. It was me who wore flared bell bottom pants with an orange stripe down the legs. It was me who went to the state youth conference in Fresno and me who played basketball day and night. Even when I developed age spots on my arm, I didn't think I was old. When I noticed there were wrinkles around my eyes, the idea of aging was not something I considered. The day my hair stylist used a mirror to show me I had a bald spot on the back of my head, I continued to believe I was still young. But when I was diagnosed with skin cancer, I saw my age for what it truly was and that I was much closer to my passing than to my birth. Age creeps up on you without warning and it takes brutal honesty on your part to face the reality of your age and how you should best respond to it. Here is our big idea. Be defined by the excellence of your life, not by its chronological age.

By the time Abraham reached one hundred, he already had a full and successful life. Yet what would have been shocking to him as well as his employees and certainly his wife was that he had just reached middle age. Abraham still had a full seventy five years longer to go. At the age of 137, he became a widower upon the death of his wife Sarah, and he remarried and fathered six more sons with Keturah. No one would have blamed Abraham for packing it in at the age of 100 and "retiring". Like many, he could have gone about muttering from then on that he was "too old for this". But there seems to be no hint of such an approach. Men or women who think that way don't go on to conceive six more boys. Somehow, Abraham, despite his great age, found a way to stay young and add to the quality of his life as he got older. Let's look at seven golden guides to staying young as seen in Abraham and others.

Be flexible. Of course physical therapists would promote this lifestyle but here we are talking about the philosophy of life one takes. To stay young, you have to be willing to shift your plans and change your mind on matters as God reveals to you something new. Without flexibility, segregation never would have ended and we still in the Bay Area would have brown, hazy skies from severe air pollution. Many churches have died because they refused to change the style of their worship services and didn't welcome new leadership into their body. If you want to stay young, you have to be willing to change. Abraham, when told by God that he was to sacrifice his son Isaac, could have refused to do so. He like Jonah could have tried to hide from God but he didn't. Abraham, trusting God, did what He told him to do. **By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.** (Hebrews 11: 17-19 NIV) As a result, Abraham's love of God grew and his belief in Him reached new heights.

Second, practice gratitude. Some of the hardest, coldest, most miserable people in the world never recognize how they have been blessed and supported by others. After Abraham rescued Lot by driving off the four kings and their armies who conquered Sodom, he and those with them gained great wealth from the spoils of war. Rather than hoarding it all and congratulating himself for the great victory, in gratitude to the Lord, Abraham gave to Melchizedek the priest of God one tenth of the wealth he gained. **Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.** (Genesis 14: 20b NIV) People who practice gratitude and acknowledge the help of others, whether it be waiters, co-workers, or family members are happier and enjoy life more than those who don't make a practice of gratitude. Third, let go of grudges. Nothing will make you old and cranky before your time like staying upset with others. We can't say how far the conflict between Abraham and Lot drove the two apart, but as we saw last week, there was enough animosity between Lot and Abraham, at least on Lot's part, that they moved far away from each other and never seemed to reconcile. Yet, when God informed Abraham that He was going to destroy Sodom where Lot lived, Abraham, without mentioning Lot by name, begged God not to destroy Sodom if there were righteous people living there. The young at heart are allergic to staying upset with others because they realize it only ruins themselves. Paul, without mentioning the personal benefits of not holding grudges insists, **Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.** (Colossians 3: 13 NIV)

Fourth, have a dream. Pursue a vision or a goal that God puts in your heart, something you know will leave a mark on the world that is glorious and lovely. Abraham had the vision given by the LORD of being father of a great nation, one dedicated to holiness and loyalty to God. **"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.** (Genesis 12: 2 NIV) Do you have a dream? I saw where some kids had the dream of building wells and providing fresh water to villages without water and now that Christian work is going on all around the world. I know of someone working on a suicide prevention hotline because he wants to save lives. Do you really want to live the rest of your life watching TV and checking for sales? Nothing makes you young quite like knowing that what you are trying to do will make the world better and bring God great honor and joy. Abraham, when his son was thirty-seven and still single after his mother Sarah died, decided he would help his son, who many think may have been a bit of a momma's boy, find a wife. Not wanting his son to marry one of the pagan women living in the region, Abraham pulled his chief servant in and gave him the commission of traveling some eight hundred miles to see if there was a woman among Abraham's relatives in Haran who would make a good wife for Isaac. Abraham's dream required a godly wife for his son Isaac and Abraham pursued that dream vigorously.

Fifth, and this is very related to four. Attempt the impossible. Try to do something that is bound to fail if God doesn't intervene. Imagine Abraham and Sarah too thinking at age ninety they could ever possibly have children together if God didn't do something about it! **Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the Lord?"** (Genesis 18: 13-14a NIV) It was crazy to consider and yet they had a son when Sarah was ninety years old. What better way to enjoy your life than watching for Christ to help you accomplish what only He can do through you? William Wilberforce, a member of England's Parliament spent his entire adult life trying to end slavery in the British empire. It seemed it could not ever be done and over the course of decades he fought against the most powerful people in England to try to end it. Wilberforce was a man of prayer and faith and far before the United States, England ended the slave trade in its empire. Wilberforce lived a mere three days after the abolition of slavery was passed into law in 1833.

Sixth. Prioritize blessing others. With your mind set on how you can uplift and make the lives of others better, you will find joy rise in you. When Abraham had three visitors show up in his camp, he immediately got a barbecue together to serve them lunch. **So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread." Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it.** (Genesis 18 :6-7 NIV) Without knowing it, Abraham was entertaining angels which the Bible says has happened to others too and could be the case for you. **Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.** (Hebrews 13: 2 NIV) Years ago when I was an impoverished college student away from home, an elderly widow who I only met briefly, a strong and faithful Christian, used to send me little amounts of money periodically. It certainly wasn't enough to get me through school, but it brought me great joy when I would get one of her checks. You may have no idea what heaven thinks of the ways you bless others, but you can be certain of this. What you do for someone else will make your life more joyful and keep you young in heart.

Seventh, be refreshed by God. Each day receive a fresh infusion of God. Take a moment to let this quote from Psalm 23 sink into you. **The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.** (Psalm 23 :1-3 NIV) It is documented that several times, either by dreams or in physical meetings, Abraham met with God. Each time it revitalized him. You can have a larger dose of God's encouragement than even Abraham had. When you are born again, you have the Holy Spirit living in you and that is a much more powerful working of God in you than Abraham ever experienced. You have the supernatural force of God running through you and if you go to Him as you read the Bible, as you pray, as you meditate on a verse, you have all the goodness of God the Psalmist describes working through you. If you want to live a young life, enjoy God more. This is our big idea. Be defined by the excellence of your life, not by its chronological age. This week embrace one of these seven golden guides to staying young.