



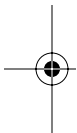
## Getting the Most Out of *Abraham*

*The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett tells the story of a young orphan girl named Mary Lennox who goes to live with her maternal uncle, Archibald Craven, at Misselthwaite Manor in Yorkshire, England. "Everybody said she was the most disagreeable-looking child ever seen. It was true, too. She had a little thin face and a little thin body, thin light hair and a sour expression." Mary was extremely spoiled, self-centered and bad tempered. She loved no one, and no one loved her.

Then one day while playing outside Mary discovers the door to a walled garden, a secret garden, that no one had entered for ten years.

"It was the sweetest, most mysterious-looking place any one could imagine. The high walls which shut it in were covered with the leafless stems of climbing roses which were so thick that they were matted together. Mary Lennox knew they were roses because she had seen a great many roses in India. All the ground was covered with grass of a wintry brown and out of it grew clumps of bushes which were surely rosebushes if they were alive. . . . Mary had thought it must be different from other gardens which had not been left all by themselves so long; and indeed it was different from any other place she had ever seen in her life."

Mary and a boy named Dickon begin lovingly to care for the garden. They clear away the grass and weeds that are smothering the plants trying to push up from the earth. They prune the rosebushes, plant seeds and bulbs, and spend every waking minute in the secret garden.





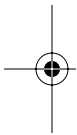
When spring arrives, a miracle happens. Both the garden and Mary begin to blossom and grow until there is a profusion of roses, daffodils, crocuses and every other variety of flower, and the sickly, sour-faced girl becomes healthy and radiant. At first the children think this is all the result of Magic, but then Dickon's mother explains that the Magic has a name, and together they sing the doxology: "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

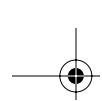
The book of Genesis tells the story of a man named Abraham, who lives in a barren land of pagans, idols and immorality. Then one day he meets the Lord, the "God from whom all blessings flow," who promises to make Abraham flourish and become fruitful beyond his wildest imagination. Slowly, over a period of twenty-five years, a miracle begins to happen. This former pagan gradually becomes a man of God; this liar and deceiver becomes full of truth and wisdom; and the tender, delicate faith Abraham has at the beginning of the story grows stronger and more resilient until it becomes a model of faith for generations to come—and for us today.

This LifeGuide introduces us to the life of Abraham, the man of faith and the friend of God. In nine sessions we too will learn how to patiently trust God and wait for the fulfillment of his amazing promises to us. We will discover that all the blessings we experience in life are the result of the divine Magic, which has a name: "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

### **Suggestions for Individual Study**

1. As you begin each study, pray that God will speak to you through his Word.
2. Read the introduction to the study and respond to the personal reflection question or exercise. This is designed to help you focus on God and on the theme of the study.
3. Each study deals with a particular passage—so that you





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can delve into the author's meaning in that context. Read and reread the passage to be studied. The questions are written using the language of the New International Version, so you may wish to use that version of the Bible. The New Revised Standard Version is also recommended.

4. This is an inductive Bible study, designed to help you discover for yourself what Scripture is saying. The study includes three types of questions. *Observation* questions ask about the basic facts: who, what, when, where and how. *Interpretation* questions delve into the meaning of the passage. *Application* questions help you discover the implications of the text for growing in Christ. These three keys unlock the treasures of Scripture.

Write your answers to the questions in the spaces provided or in a personal journal. Writing can bring clarity and deeper understanding of yourself and of God's Word.

5. It might be good to have a Bible dictionary handy. Use it to look up any unfamiliar words, names or places.

6. Use the prayer suggestion to guide you in thanking God for what you have learned and to pray about the applications that have come to mind.

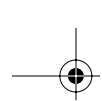
7. You may want to go on to the suggestion under "Now or Later," or you may want to use that idea for your next study.

**Suggestions for Members of a Group Study**

1. Come to the study prepared. Follow the suggestions for individual study mentioned above. You will find that careful preparation will greatly enrich your time spent in group discussion.

2. Be willing to participate in the discussion. The leader of your group will not be lecturing. Instead, he or she will be encouraging the members of the group to discuss what they have learned. The leader will be asking the questions that are found in this guide.





**3.** Stick to the topic being discussed. Your answers should be based on the verses which are the focus of the discussion and not on outside authorities such as commentaries or speakers. These studies focus on a particular passage of Scripture. Only rarely should you refer to other portions of the Bible. This allows for everyone to participate in in-depth study on equal ground.

**4.** Be sensitive to the other members of the group. Listen attentively when they describe what they have learned. You may be surprised by their insights! Each question assumes a variety of answers. Many questions do not have “right” answers, particularly questions that aim at meaning or application. Instead the questions push us to explore the passage more thoroughly.

When possible, link what you say to the comments of others. Also, be affirming whenever you can. This will encourage some of the more hesitant members of the group to participate.

**5.** Be careful not to dominate the discussion. We are sometimes so eager to express our thoughts that we leave too little opportunity for others to respond. By all means participate! But allow others to also.

**6.** Expect God to teach you through the passage being discussed and through the other members of the group. Pray that you will have an enjoyable and profitable time together, but also that as a result of the study you will find ways that you can take action individually and/or as a group.

**7.** Remember that anything said in the group is considered confidential and should not be discussed outside the group unless specific permission is given to do so.

**8.** If you are the group leader, you will find additional suggestions at the back of the guide.

