

## DIVINE REFRIGERATOR RIGHTS A Devotional Meditation from

Genesis 18:1-22:24; 2 Kings 4:1-37; Ezekiel 16:48-50; Luke 17:7-10; John 15:12-17

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Some years ago, Drs. Will Miller and Glenn Sparks published a book called *Refrigerator Rights: Creating Connections and Restoring Relationships*.<sup>\*</sup> The authors emphasize the importance of connecting with people by “human interaction and a solid social support system,” not merely by social media, email, or phone. The connection they find ideal involves refrigerator rights, which is “having people in your life who can literally help themselves to the contents of your refrigerator without needing your permission.”<sup>†</sup>



I haven't read the book, but I think I have lived out the principles behind it. Those who have rights to my refrigerator are people I know and trust. Our relationship extends beyond the surface because we know something of each other's stories. We have shared joys and sorrows by walking through life's experiences together. We have earned a special place in each other's hearts by sharing one another's burdens, even when it costs us a bit of comfort – or perhaps a bit more than that. This kind of relationship is the kind that lends itself to table fellowship. We gladly sit down to eat with one another, letting down our guard and opening our hearts to speak honestly, to laugh and cry, and above all to lift each other up.

Refrigerator rights may be a rare thing in this modern world. We coexist with multitudes of people, but how many do we allow beyond our front door? A few friends, perhaps even some family – although even kinship ties do not always guarantee the kind of intimate relationship that results in refrigerator rights. Unless they have earned our trust, we remain reluctant to let them see us in our unguarded, vulnerable moments.

That is the way of things with our fellow human beings, but is it also the way of things with our Creator? We sing about being the friend of God, but are we really? Have we developed the kind of relationship with our Maker that allows us to sit at table with Him, to see more of Him than others see, and to let Him see us at our worst?

This is the kind of relationship our father Abraham cultivated with the Almighty. God Himself calls Abraham His friend (Isaiah 41:8). That's very important. The Bible never says Abraham called himself a friend of God, even though he enjoyed the ancient equivalent of refrigerator rights with the Almighty. God was comfortable enough in Abraham's home that He could appear unannounced and expect to receive a hearty welcome and a full meal. He put Abraham to a lot of trouble, showing up in the heat of

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<sup>\*</sup> Miller, Will, and Glenn Sparks. *Refrigerator Rights: Creating Connection and Restoring Relationships*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Amherst, MA: White River Press, 2015).

<sup>†</sup> *Refrigerator Rights* book description, [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B000APR004).

the day while His friend was still recovering from the circumcision God Himself had required him to endure as part of the covenant the two of them concluded.

That's genuine friendship, the fruit of decades of intentional relationship-building. The point of God's visit was to reward Abraham's faithful friendship with the long-awaited announcement that his promised son would be born within a year. Such a promise is hard to embrace when one has endured years of barrenness. The Shunammite woman who received such a promise from Elisha the prophet begged him not to say such a thing and leave her devastated when it did not come to pass. Abraham and Sarah laughed, but their laughter betrayed the same reluctance to embrace the promise for fear that, once again, they would be disappointed. Elisha had refrigerator rights with the Shunammite woman and her family, and, like God with Abraham, sought to return the kindnesses they had shown him. The fulfillment of the promises brought those relationships to a new level when both families embraced newborn sons at the appointed time.

How intimate were those relationships? In the Shunammite's case, intimate enough to trust the prophet to intercede when her son died so that he might be restored to her. Her request came from a place of desperation, but she trusted not only the prophet who had become part of her family, but the God whom the prophet represented – even to the point of surrendering her only son to their care.

Perhaps the Shunammite had learned this from her father Abraham. He surrendered not just one, but two sons to the Almighty. He sent away his oldest son, Ishmael, with his mother, Hagar, when Sarah demanded he do so. Yet God had promised His friend that Ishmael would become a great nation also – a promise made after Abraham had interceded for him (Genesis 17:18-21). God came through on that promise by saving the boy and his mother in the desert, no doubt much to Abraham's relief – and probably also in response to his intercession.

Intercession. That's another thing friends do for and with one another. It's why God trusted Abraham enough to share with him the hard task He had of investigating Sodom's wickedness. The people of Sodom had no clue about their Creator's concern, nor that one man stood between them and imminent destruction. How could they? They had never cultivated a relationship with the Almighty. One wonders if they had ever cultivated any relationships beyond satisfaction of their own desires. They certainly had no refrigerator rights with Abraham's nephew, Lot. Rather than waiting for an invitation, they demanded entry to his home, and so sealed their fate.

We think of Sodomites as desperately wicked and depraved, but that's not the root of their sin. God says they got to that point by turning a blind eye to the needs of their neighbors, and instead demanding satisfaction on their own terms:

Behold, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: pride, gluttony, and careless ease—so had she and her daughters—and she did not strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. So they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I removed them when I saw it. (Ezekiel 16:48-50 TLV)

This makes it hard for us to condemn Sodom for their wickedness. The truth is, no one wants to be known as wicked and depraved, but none of us seem to mind if we're just a little bit selfish. Not enough to hurt anyone, of course. Just enough to make sure

we get our fair share of whatever we think we need. Maybe that's how the people of Sodom were, once. But it's not long before a little harmless selfishness turns into demands for our rights, and anger at anyone who stands in the way of our demands.

That's the opposite of what Abraham did. In fact, he did what Yeshua advised:

"But if you have a slave who is plowing or tending sheep, who among you will say to him when he comes in from the field, 'Come right in, and recline at table'? But won't he instead say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat! Dress yourself and wait on me while I eat and drink; and afterward, you may eat and drink'? He doesn't thank the slave because he did what he was commanded, does he? So you too, when you've done everything you are commanded, say, 'We are unworthy slaves. We have done only what we were supposed to do.'" (Luke 17:7-10 TLV)

This is advice we should expect from the Messiah who told people to be humble and choose the lowest places, to serve others rather than seek to be served, and to lay down even their lives if they truly love someone. Just as it takes time and effort for people to move from casual acquaintances to intimate friends, it takes time and effort for us to become intimate friends of God. It's not something we proclaim or declare, but something He confers on us, just as the Messiah said:

"This is My commandment, that you love one another just as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this: that he lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you. I am no longer calling you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing. Now I have called you friends, because everything I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you. I selected you so that you would go and produce fruit, and your fruit would remain. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in My name. These things I command you, so that you may love one another." (John 17:12-17 TLV)

When you think about it, loving one another seems like the best way to cultivate genuine relationships – the kind of relationships that lead to reciprocal refrigerator rights.