

Prayer is an opportunity to bring our will into line with God's plan

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Week No. 23

Text: Genesis 18:16-33

Introduction

Did Abraham change God's mind? Of course not. The more likely answer is that God changed Abraham's mind. Abraham knew that God is just and that he punishes sin, but he may have wondered about God's mercy. Abraham seemed to be probing God's mind to see how merciful he really was. He left his conversation with God convinced that God was both kind and fair. Our prayers won't change God's mind, but they may change ours just as Abraham's prayer changed his. Prayer helps us better understand the mind of God.

Intercessory Faith—The Steps to Becoming An Intercessor, A Prayer Warrior, 18:16-33

1. Abraham yearned to walk with God step by step, longed for His presence (v.16)

[Ge 18:16] Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way.

- a. The men looked, walked toward Sodom (v.16a)
- b. Abraham joined them (v.16b)

By yearning to walk with God step by step, longing for His presence. Remember, the Lord and two angels had appeared to Abraham at the door of his tent, and they had spent a good deal of time with him. Now the Lord and the two angels arose, looked down toward Sodom, and began to walk toward the city. Note, Abraham joined them. He did not have to follow them; he could have stayed behind at his tent. But this he did not do. Abraham joined the Lord as He walked away to begin the journey toward Sodom. Why? Because Abraham just did not want to leave the Lord's presence. He had tasted (experienced) the closest bond of friendship imaginable with the Lord...

- a strong sense of friendship and fellowship with God ([Genesis 18:1-8](#)).
- a strong assurance of God's promises ([Genesis 18:10-14](#)).
- a deep awareness of God's unlimited power ([Genesis 18:10](#)).

The deep sense of friendship, fellowship, and assurance of God's power all swelled up within Abraham's heart, and he just did not want the experience to end. He wanted to spend as much time as he could in God's presence so he walked along with the Lord step by step.

Application:

A true intercessor wants to walk along with the Lord step by step and longs for God's presence. He yearns to develop the closest, most intimate friendship possible with the Lord. Therefore, he seeks and makes opportunity...

- to turn his thoughts to the Lord throughout the day.
- to captivate every thought, focusing upon things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of a good report ([Phil. 4:8](#)).
- to set aside blocks of time for concentrated, uninterrupted prayer—every day.

Simply stated, the intercessor wants and longs for God's presence, to walk along with God step by step, all day and all night long.

2. Abraham thought of God's great call and purpose for his life (v.17-19)

[Ge 18:17] And the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, [18] since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?"

[19] For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him."

- a. Abraham was led to think of His call and purpose (v.18)
- b. Abraham was led to think of His duty (v.19a-b)
 - 1) His duty to teach the way of the Lord (v.19a)
 - 2) His duty to teach what is right and just (v.19b)
- c. Abraham was led to think of faithfulness and of reward (v.19c)

How does a person become an intercessor, a prayer warrior? By thinking of God's great call and purpose for one's life. Note what the Lord did: He spoke softly to Himself, yet loud enough so that Abraham could hear (cp. [Genesis 18:23](#)). Why? There are three reasons.

1. Abraham needed to think of his God-given call and purpose ([Genesis 18:18](#)). He was to father a great and powerful nation; moreover, all the nations of the earth were to be blessed through him, through the promised seed, the Savior of the world, who was to be a descendant of his. Note what God was arousing within Abraham: a sense of responsibility for the world. God was about to execute His justice upon Sodom and Gomorrah—destroy it—because of their terrible wickedness. God wanted Abraham to sense a responsibility for both the righteous and the wicked; God

wanted Abraham stirred to intercede—to struggle and wrestle in prayer—for the cities of the earth. Abraham had a *responsibility*—a part—in the lives of his fellow men, both the righteous and the wicked. He must, therefore, be aroused to pray for them, even to the point of struggling in prayer.

2. Abraham needed to think of his duty to teach the ways of the Lord, to teach what is right and just (Genesis 18:19). Abraham was soon to witness the justice of God falling upon Sodom and Gomorrah. God wanted Abraham to understand God's ways, that He always does what is right and just, and God wanted Abraham to teach the ways of God. Thus God reminded Abraham of his teaching duties, reminded him right before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

3. Abraham needed to think of faithfulness and of the reward for being faithful. God made great promises to Abraham, and He was going to bring about these promises. But Abraham needed to remember: he was to be faithful; he was to teach the ways of the Lord. Then and only then would the Lord reward him; then and only then would Abraham receive the promises.

Application:

Focusing upon the same three subjects will stir us to become intercessors for God:

- 1) Thinking about God's great call and purpose. God has called us to know the promised seed, the Savior, and to make Him known. We have a *responsibility*, a part, in the lives of our fellow men, both the righteous and the wicked. We must, therefore, be aroused to pray for them, even to the point of struggling in prayer.
- 2) Thinking about our duty to teach the ways of the Lord. We need to pray and pray much—intercede for ourselves and for others—if we are going to teach the ways of God.
- 3) Thinking about our great need to be faithful and the great reward promised us if we are faithful. We can never walk faithfully without God's help; thus we need to be constantly praying, even interceding, for God's help.

3 Abraham sensed the pain of God's heart over wickedness (v.20-21)

*[Ge 18:20] And the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave,
[21] I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know."*

- a. Because the righteous outcry against sin is great: Against Sodom and Gomorrah (v.20)
- b. Because of impending judgment: The cities—all persons—must be examined and judged (v.21)

How does a person become an intercessor, a prayer warrior? By sensing the pain of God's heart over the wickedness of man. God told Abraham that He was going to execute justice, examine Sodom and Gomorrah to see if their sin was so great that

they needed to be destroyed. Note how softly God made this statement: He did not say that He was going to destroy the cities, but rather that He was going down to examine them, to examine the outcry for justice that was rising against them. Scripture tells us that God is longsuffering, not willing that any person should perish ([2 Peter 3:9](#); [1 Tim. 2:4](#); [Ezekiel 33:11](#)). The wording of God's statement indicates just this: He wanted to extend His mercy and give the people every chance to repent and turn to Him. His heart was hurting and suffering pain...

- over their sin.
- over the outcry for justice, for God's righteous judgment.
- over the impending judgment that hung over the people's heads.

God wanted Abraham to sense the pain of His heart over wickedness: He wanted Abraham crying out—becoming an intercessor—for the souls of both the righteous and the ungodly of the cities. Moreover...

- God wanted to teach all believers of succeeding generations to follow Abraham's example in crying out—in becoming intercessors—for the souls of people.
- God wanted to teach all people that God is longsuffering and full of mercy, not willing that any person perish, but His mercy is open only to those who believe in Him and receive His mercy. Remember that God had given Sodom and Gomorrah every chance in the world to repent and turn to Him. They had a chance to repent when Abraham freed them from captivity to the invading army from the east ([Genesis 14:1-16](#); [Genesis 14:17-24](#)); when Melchizedek, the priest of God, bore testimony to them ([Genesis 14:18-20](#)); and through the testimony of Lot, weak as his witness was ([2 Peter 2:6-9](#)).
- God wanted to teach all people that sin leads to judgment, and judgment will be executed. God is going to judge the world.

4. Abraham stood boldly before the Lord in prayer—refusing to leave the Lord's presence (v.22-26)

[Ge 18:22] Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD.

[23] And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?"

[24] Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it?

[25] Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

[26] So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes."

- a. Abraham drew near God (v.23a)

- b. Abraham expressed concern for the righteous: Asked God to spare the city if fifty righteous people were found there (v.23b-24)
- c. Abraham acknowledged that God is just and righteous (v.25)
- d. God answered Abraham's prayer (v.26)

How does a person become an intercessor, a prayer warrior? By standing boldly before the Lord in prayer. Note, two of the men turned and walked toward Sodom, but not the Lord. Abraham remained standing in front of the Lord; he would not let the Lord go.

1. Abraham drew near—approached, walked up closer—to the Lord. The Hebrew word for *drew near* (naghash) means "to come to court to argue a case" (Warren W. Wiersbe. *Be Obedient*, p.78). Abraham was approaching God to pray, to intercede for both the righteous and the ungodly of the cities. Abraham stood before God just like an attorney to plead for the souls of the people.

2. Abraham was concerned—deeply concerned—over the righteous within the cities. Remember: Lot, Abraham's nephew who had been like a son to him in earlier years, and Lot's family were living in Sodom. Abraham was now feeling the pain of God's heart over sin and judgment, for part of his own family stood the chance of being condemned. The point to see is the pain Abraham was feeling over sin and coming judgment, the pain that God's heart always feels because His people are in constant rebellion against Him: rejecting and denying God, cursing and ignoring God.

Abraham was driven to share his hurt, burden, and concern with the Lord.

⇒ Would God destroy the righteous with the wicked? Abraham apparently felt there were many believers living in Sodom.

⇒ Would God spare the city if fifty righteous people were found therein?

3. Note what Abraham appealed to in asking God to spare the righteous and the city: not the mercy of God, but the *justice of God*: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" God must not—just cannot, because of His promises—destroy the righteous along with the unrighteous.

4. God must, therefore, answer and grant Abraham's prayer. Abraham had interceded, struggled and wrestled in prayer; therefore, God had to hear and answer Abraham's prayer: all because He is just and righteous. God has promised to save eternally all those who believe in Him and live righteous lives. Therefore, He can never destroy the righteous along with the unrighteous and wicked. This was Abraham's appeal, and it was the right appeal to make.

Application:

How can we become an intercessor, a prayer warrior? By standing boldly before the Lord in prayer and by appealing to His justice. God will always do what is right and just. God will never judge a person beyond that which he deserves. Every person will receive exactly what he deserves, nothing more and nothing less. God's justice will be executed upon every person, but it will be perfect justice. God will do what is right and just, perfectly so.

5. Abraham laid hold of the open access (door) into God's presence (v.27-28)

[Ge 18:27] Then Abraham answered and said, "Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord:

[28] Suppose there were five less than the fifty righteous; would You destroy all of the city for lack of five?" So He said, "If I find there forty-five, I will not destroy it."

- a. Abraham acknowledged his unworthiness (v.27)
- b. Abraham asked God to spare the city if forty-five righteous persons were found (v.28a)
- c. God continued to answer his prayer (v.28b)

How does a person become an intercessor, a prayer warrior? By laying hold of the open access—the open door—into God's presence. No doubt, all the wickedness within the cities began to engross Abraham's mind, and he began to wonder if there were anywhere close to fifty righteous people within the city. Apparently, he felt that if he asked only for Lot and his dear family, he would be acting selfishly. And Abraham was not selfish, nor was he concerned only for Lot and his family. What could he do? How could he pray so that God would both save the city and understand that he was not selfish? There was only one way: keep praying and asking God for more and more until He said "No." But ask God in all humility. Note how Abraham approached the Lord this second time: confessing that he was but dust and ashes. And note the word **Lord (Adonai)**. This is not the personal name for *Lord*, but rather the more formal title for God. Abraham was appealing to the Lord who is the Sovereign Ruler and Judge of all the earth.

Abraham asked God to spare the city if forty-five righteous were found, and God answered his prayer.

Application:

How can we become intercessors, prayer warriors? By approaching God in humility, as dust and ashes, and laying hold of God, laying hold of the open access and door into His presence.

6. Abraham continued to pray and beseech God, praying on and on and never giving up: If forty righteous people were found (v.29)

[Ge 18:29] And he spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose there should be forty found there?" So He said, "I will not do it for the sake of forty."

How does a person become an intercessor, a prayer warrior? By continuing in prayer, praying on and on and not giving up, but beseeching God. The verse and point is self-explanatory: Abraham asked God to spare the city if forty righteous people were found, and God answered his prayer.

Application:

The true intercessor refuses to give up. He continues to pray on and on. This is exactly what Scripture tells us to do.

7. Abraham persevered in concern and prayer (v.30-33)

[Ge 18:30] Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Suppose thirty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there."

[31] And he said, "Indeed now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: Suppose twenty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of twenty."

[32] Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but once more: Suppose ten should be found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten."

[33] So the LORD went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

- a. Abraham persevered meekly: Pleaded for God not to be angry but to continue hearing his prayer (v.30-31a)
 - 1) Asked God to spare the city for thirty righteous people (v.30)
 - 2) God answered His prayer (v.31a)
- b. Abraham persevered boldly (v.31b-32a)
 - 1) Asked God for the city if twenty righteous persons were found (v.31b)
 - 2) God answered his prayer (v.32a)
- c. Abraham persevered until the end, one more time (v.32b-33)
 - 1) Asked God for ten righteous persons (v.32b)
 - 2) God answered his prayer (v.32c)
 - 3) The communion, intercession, ended (v.33)

How does a person become an intercessor, a prayer warrior? By persevering in concern and prayer. Abraham has already given us a striking picture of intercessory prayer, showing us just how we should be constantly praying—struggling and wrestling—for the souls of the righteous and of the wicked. Abraham had stayed before God, asking God to save the city *three different times*—a graphic picture of intercession, of asking and asking. But the lesson is not over: God wants us shocked, shaken to the core with the fact: believers are to become intercessors, prayer warriors, for the earth. Believers are to persevere in concern and prayer. Note the lesson of Abraham.

1. Abraham persevered meekly (Genesis 18:30). He pleaded for God not to be angry with him but to continue hearing him: Would God spare the city for thirty righteous people? God answered the prayer of His *prayer warrior*.

2. Abraham persevered boldly (Genesis 18:31): he asked for the city if twenty righteous persons were found. God again, for the fifth time, answered the prayer of His *prayer warrior*.

3. Abraham persevered to the end, one more time (Genesis 18:32). Abraham told God that he would make this one last request: would God spare the city for ten righteous souls? God answered the prayer of this *great prayer warrior*, answered for the sixth time.

4. The communion with God, the intercession, was now over. The Lord went His way, and Abraham went home. Abraham had persevered in prayer until the end. He had done all he could, and God had answered each time.

Application:

Scripture assures us: if we persevere in prayer, God will hear and answer.

Conclusion

Why did God let Abraham question his justice and intercede for a wicked city? Abraham knew that God must punish sin, but he also knew from experience that God is merciful to sinners. God knew there were not 10 innocent people in the city, but he was merciful enough to allow Abraham to intercede. He was also merciful enough to help Lot, Abraham's nephew, get out of Sodom before it was destroyed. God does not take pleasure in destroying the wicked, but he must punish sin. He is both just and merciful. We should be thankful that God's mercy extends to us.

Question to ponder:

1. Why does the Lord decide to tell Abraham about his decision to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah ([Genesis 18:16-19](#))?
2. In the long conversation that follows ([Genesis 18:20-33](#)), what do you learn about Abraham's attitude toward the wicked cities and toward the Lord?
3. How would you describe the Lord's attitude toward the cities and his relationship with Abraham?
4. In what areas could we intercede with God for our city, state or country because of its sins?
5. How might this kind of prayer affect our attitudes and actions toward those around us?