

Genesis 18:20-32

Dear Children blessed to be able to speak to your Father:

A couple saw a marriage counselor. The husband said, *"We've been at odds a lot lately and our marriage seems to be headed in the wrong direction."* His wife added, *"But we don't get it. Our lives are good. We have good jobs, great kids, lots of friends."* The counselor asked, "Do you make time to talk to each other?" *"Oh, yes,"* the husband said. *"We have to talk so we can figure out who's picking up dinner, taking the kids to games, and all that. Texting comes in real handy that way."*

The counselor said, "That's not what I mean. When was the last time you had a *real* conversation with each other; quality time talking like you did before you were married?"

Fellow Christians, this is similar to what can happen in our relationship with God. If someone asked you, "Do you talk with God?" we might say, *"Oh sure...in church, before I eat, when I'm in trouble. That's enough praying, right?"*

Our loving God, who talks to us through his Word, wants us to take time to really talk to him. So, now the question: How is your prayer life? What is a good prayer life supposed to look like? Today we'll see a man of prayer who can help guide us. His name is Abraham. Back in June during a sermon we learned how to pray like Solomon. Today we'll learn to **Pray Like Abraham** (1) ***Pray Unselfishly***, (2) ***Pray Humbly***, and (3) ***Pray Boldly***

1

Abraham's nephew, Lot, and his family lived in Sodom. Although this area currently is nothing but barren wasteland SE of the Dead Sea, at one time it was fertile and thriving. Lot had chosen the area for his herds to graze.

The Lord revealed to Abraham that he was going to destroy Sodom, along with the Gomorrah, and the entire countryside. We should not forget the nature of the sins of Sodom & Gomorrah. As you read the entire account, you realize that God was condemning their sexual sins, promiscuity, of every kind -- homosexual and heterosexual. The Lord says, ***"The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous..."*** The people there had sunk so deeply into their moral filth that God had no more patience. He was about to wipe them off the face of the earth so they could spread their depravity and mislead others no more.

For his own reasons, God allowed Abraham to know his intentions to destroy these cities. God recorded Abraham's response in the Bible in order to teach believers throughout the centuries, including us, important lessons about prayer.

Six times Abraham pleaded with God to spare the cities for the sake of believers living in them. He started with 50 and worked his way down to 10 -- the approximate number of people in Lot's family. He prayed, ***"Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the righteous people in it?"*** Abraham knew how the Lord had wiped out an entire earth of people in the Great Flood, but spared 8, led by Noah, who would retain and share the gospel of a Savior. So, Abraham thought, would God spare the believers once again?

Abraham's prayer is **unselfish**. When he keeps going from 50 to 10, he's not "haggling" with God like a shopper versus a tightfisted merchant at a Middle Eastern bazaar. His prayer came from a heart that had compassion for others. So often we pray for our own little group. It's something like, *"Lord, bless me, my wife, my son, and my daughter. Bless us four and no more!"*

We find it easy to talk to God about our own aches, pains, and troubles: *"Lord, the ol' arthritis is acting up again";* or *"Lord, the cash outflow is exceeding the cash inflow. Can you send a little something more my way?"* And that's okay! But what about talking to God about our friend whose marriage is struggling? What about young people dealing with unimaginable health situations in Children's Hospital? What about people living in neighborhoods filled with crime and drugs -- and for the

police officers who try to protect and help them? What about farmers who depend on undependable weather to earn a living and feed a nation? The list is endless! Can we, will we, include them and others in our prayers? The Lord says, ***“I urge you, brothers and sisters, that requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for everyone...”*** (1 Tm 2:1). We can be unselfish in our prayers like our spiritual father, Abraham.

2

Did you also notice Abraham’s attitude as he prayed? He comes before the Lord with deep humility. ***“I am nothing but dust and ashes,”*** he said. His attitude was, ***“Who am I to speak to you or ask anything from you?”*** He knew God was holy and he was unholy. The only reason he could even approach God in prayer was because of the promised Savior who would himself be holy and give his holiness to those who believed in him; and die for our ungodliness as well. ***“There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”*** (1 Tim 2:5). When we pray, God isn’t looking for fancy words. He’s looking for humble hearts filled with faith in Jesus who gives us access to the universe’s holy Creator!

Notice, the Lord didn’t say to Abraham, ***“Be quiet, you puny human being with a pea-sized brain. Quit whining!”*** No, God, with much more patience than we earthly fathers have, invites us to pray, listens carefully to his children’s prayers, and promises to answer in a way that is according to his perfect, loving plan for us today and eternally.

3

That’s why, even though we pray humbly, we can also pray boldly. To pray boldly is to honor God and give him glory. It’s saying in effect, ***“Lord, I know you love me. You told me to pray, so I am doing so trusting that your answer will be perfect!”***

When you read this account of Abraham’s prayer, do you think to yourself, ***“Why don’t I pray this way?”*** Wouldn’t it be great to pray so boldly? Sometimes we take the “why bother” approach to prayer. ***“My friend is sick. Will it really make a difference if I pray? After all, God is in charge. Why bother praying about it?”*** Or, we see our nation tolerating immorality more and more -- becoming a modern day version of Sodom and Gomorrah. ***“I know I should be praying to God about this, but why bother? I’m just one person.”***

Do you know who it is that whispers, “Why bother?” in our ears? It’s the devil. CS Lewis wrote a book called *The Screwtape Letters*. It’s a series of letters written by one of Satan’s chief demons named “Screwtape.” He writes to other demons and says, ***“Prayer is lethal to our cause.”*** Screwtape’s advice to his fellow fallen angels is to do everything possible to distract, divert, and sidetrack Christians from praying. Just convince believers that praying doesn’t matter, that it makes no difference. Why bother praying?

Let me ask you, did God listen to the prayer of Abraham? Did God answer the prayer of Abraham? Did it make a difference? We can’t always expect a “yes” answer to our prayers because God determines that a “no” answer is sometimes the best answer. But Abraham’s prayer clearly was worth the bother.

Fellow Christians, as someone once said, ***“The church needs organizers, but it also needs agonizers”*** -- people ready and willing to wrestle with God in prayer, just like Abraham agonized over Sodom, like Jesus agonized in Gethsemane. Pray, fellow believers, pray - unselfishly, humbly, and boldly!

Amen.