

Pray with Persistence

Genesis 18:20-32

²⁰ So the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very flagrant, ²¹ I will go down now and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has come to me. If not, I will know." ²² The two men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. ²³ Abraham approached him and said, "Will you really sweep away the righteous along with the wicked? ²⁴ What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep them away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? ²⁵ You would never do such a thing, killing the righteous along with the wicked, treating the righteous the same as the wicked. You would never do such a thing. The Judge of all the earth should do right, shouldn't he?" ²⁶ The LORD said, "If I find fifty righteous people within the city of Sodom, then I will spare the entire place for their sake." ²⁷ Abraham answered, "See now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it on myself to speak to my Lord. ²⁸ What if there are five fewer than fifty righteous? Will you destroy the entire city if the number is five short?" He said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." ²⁹ He spoke to him yet again and said, "What if only forty are found there?" He said, "I will not do it for the sake of the forty." ³⁰ He said, "Please, do not be angry, my Lord, but I will speak again. What if thirty are found there?" He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." ³¹ He said, "See now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to my Lord. What if there are twenty found there?" He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of the twenty." ³² He said, "Please, do not be angry, my Lord, but I will speak just once more. What if ten are found there?" He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of the ten."

What a joy it is to teach your children. It may be a task like tying their shoes or riding a two-wheeler. They look to you. They trust what you tell them. To them you are the expert and they want to learn it from you. More important than tying shoes or riding a bike is learning how to pray. That's not easily. Sure, we can teach them to fold their hands and bow their heads and close their eyes. We can teach them words to use at mealtime or at bedtime. But how do you show them how to speak to God with their hearts? God the Holy Spirit helps us do that. Scripture tells us, *"The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we should pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that are not expressed in words"* (Romans 8:26).

Jesus' disciples wanted to learn more about prayer. So they asked their Master: *"Lord teach us to pray"* (Luke 11:1). That's when Jesus taught them the Lord's Prayer. It's a perfect prayer that we still use today. Jesus then went on to teach his followers to be persistent in prayer. Persistence in prayer is shown us today by the father of all believers. Father Abraham prayed with persistence when he asked God to spare the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham shows us why we can pray with persistence because God has, first of all, made himself available to hear our prayers. We pray with persistence because God's grace leads us to show loving concern for others. Let's follow Abraham as he shows how to pray with persistence.

When it comes to praying with persistence, it's important to realize why we can pray to God in the first place. Abraham really didn't deserve an audience with God. Abraham admitted: *"I who am but dust and ashes have taken it on myself to speak to my Lord."* It's easy to see that Abraham was not as corrupt as the people were for whom he was praying. The Lord told Abraham, *"The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, ... their sin is very flagrant."* It's not that homosexuality is an unforgiveable sin. It's just that the wicked unbelief had arisen within those cities to such a height that God had to destroy them.

But what made Abraham less deserving of the fire and brimstone that residents of Sodom would soon face? Scripture does record two occasions when Abraham showed unbelief. Twice he tried to pass his beautiful wife off as his sister. He was doing this to try and save his neck. He

had forgot that God was his shield and his very great reward (Genesis 15:1). Twice Abraham failed to put his trust in the Lord. He too was guilty of unbelief.

The only reason a sinner like Abraham could approach our holy God in prayer is because the Lord first approached Abraham with his promises. God had promised Abraham countless descendants, which was an amazing promise since Abraham and his wife were childless and well past the age of childbearing. God had promised Abraham and his descendants a vast homeland, though Abraham wandered around in tents. And most importantly, God promised a Savior from his own family. That Savior would rescue him and all people from sin. Scripture tells us, "*Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness*" (Genesis 15:6). God worked faith in Abraham's heart through the promises he made. That's why Abraham stood righteous before God. That's why Abraham could approach the Lord in prayer. With his saving promises, God made himself available to Abraham for prayer.

Consider your own prayer life. Is it the kind that God expects from his children? Sadly, prayer is something we easily forget. Often when trouble comes into our life, we forget to call upon God. Instead we choose to carry the load ourselves. Instead of tossing our cares God's way, we let ourselves worry. We even complain and maybe even question God's goodness in allowing trouble into my life. Neglecting prayer is a sinful misuse of God's name. From Luther's explanation to the 2nd Commandment, we know we should "call upon God's name in every trouble." But we don't always do that. And that's nothing short of unbelief. That's telling God he's not worthy of our trust or that he's not able to handle our problems. Fire and brimstone should be heading our way for such blatant unbelief.

But God chose to deal with us differently. He still had to punish sin. He couldn't avoid that. But God did punish all sin when he aimed his wrath and punishment against his Son. The fire and brimstone that rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah do not compare to the fiery punishment Jesus endured for us on a cross. The wicked in Sodom and Gomorrah were killed instantly. Our Lord had to agonize for hours. But when he was finished paying for sin and his life was taken from him, his Father was satisfied. Now God forgives us for our worrying, and complaining and questioning of God and our sinful neglect of prayer. And he's pleased with us because his Son was persistent in his prayer life. Think of the many times, Jesus gave up sleep so he could pray. When trouble drew near in the Garden, he turned to his Father in prayer. Now God is pleased with us. By faith we get credit for Christ's righteous prayer life. By his dying and rising again, Jesus has made our God available to every prayer. We never see a bill. We never lose a signal. Because of Christ, we have free access to God all the time. Our God will gladly hear our every prayer. So let's pray with persistence.

With such faith in God's promised Savior from sin, Abraham could stand righteous before God. That's why he could approach God in prayer. God's grace led Abraham to pray for Sodom and Gomorrah. God's grace moved Abraham to show loving concern for others.

We love because he first loved us. God's love for Abraham led Abraham to love the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Scripture tells us how Abraham once went to war for these people. Upon hearing word that his nephew Lot and the rest of Sodom had been captured by enemy kings, Abraham put an army together with his 318 servants. They put their lives on the line and God blessed their heroic efforts. Everyone returned safely to their own towns. When the wicked people of Sodom were captured, Abraham went to war for them. When they were facing God's destruction, Abraham went to pray for them.

But how could Abraham convince God not to destroy such wicked people? You couldn't find a redeemable quality in any of them. Their sin was so renown. They had earned the destruction that was coming their way. So Abraham chose to appeal to God's grace. He prayed, *"Will you really sweep away the righteous along with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep them away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? You would never do such a thing, killing the righteous along with the wicked, treating the righteous the same as the wicked. You would never do such a thing. The Judge of all the earth should do right, shouldn't he?"* Would God really destroy fifty righteous people along with the wicked? God in his grace would not. How about forty-five? How about thirty? Twenty? How about ten? No, God in his grace would not destroy those cities if he found ten believers living there.

God did answer Abraham's prayer. In his grace he spared every righteous person living in those towns. Unfortunately, there were only three—Lot and his two daughters. Even the destruction of those cities served God in his grace. He spared rest of the world from the corruption that Sodom and Gomorrah would bring to it. The destructions of Sodom and Gomorrah serve as a healthy reminder for God's people today about the dangers of sin and unbelief. God has his prophet Isaiah announce this warning against God's people in Judah: *The look on their faces testifies against them. They parade their sin like Sodom. They do not bother to hide it. How terrible it will be for them! Look, they have brought disaster upon themselves* (3:9). God had the apostle Peter remind New Testament believers, *"If God condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction, by turning them into ashes when he made them an example of things to come for the ungodly"* (2 Peter 2:6).

We don't have to look very far in our world to find people who would fall under the same destruction that Sodom and Gomorrah faced. How do we react? Do we agree that they're getting exactly what they deserve. Or maybe we have a lot more praying to do. When you realize God's grace the way Abraham did, how God would love sinners like you and me, what else can we do for our wicked world but to pray nonstop for it? Obviously, you take time each day to pray for family and friends. Jesus also commands us to pray for our enemies. Pray for those whose lifestyles we find offensive. Pray that God would open a way for them to hear the good news about our Savior. We're asking God to turn their hearts from unbelief. We're begging God to turn their hearts to him in faith. That's why Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come." God's kingdom comes to us when he sends his Holy Spirit, so we believe his Holy Word and lead a godly lives now on earth and forever in heaven. When we pray this petition, we're also asking God to use us and our church to approach others with the gospel. That way God's Spirit can create faith in their hearts. Then they too can stand righteous before God and call on him in prayer. Realizing God's grace for you in Christ, what's left but to show loving concern for all people. That's why we pray with persistence for everyone.

We learn a lot from our parents. We learn a lot about prayer from the father of believers. Abraham shows us how to pray. He shows us to be persistent in taking advantage of God's grace so we can approach him in prayer. God's love for us will move us to love all people. And we will include all people in our prayers. Keep praying for them with persistence. Rely on God's grace. Keep praying that his kingdom comes to us and the people in our lives. Pray boldly that he would use us to extend his kingdom of grace to everyone. God grant this for Jesus' sake.