

# GOD HIMSELF VISITED ABRAHAM: THE STEPS TO BECOMING AN INTERCESSOR, A PRAYER WARRIOR GENESIS 18:16–33

## *Introduction — Prayer — Intercession*

God wanted Abraham to do something special, very special. God wanted Abraham to become an *intercessor*, that is, a believer who struggles and wrestles in prayer for others, and who does it often. The words *struggle*, *wrestle*, and *often* are the key words. God wants believers who will pray often — constantly — believers who will struggle and wrestle in prayer for people and for the needs of the world.

*2 Pet 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

How do we become *intercessors*? Get alone and focus our thoughts and prayers upon people in need, upon both the unbelievers and believers of the world. When prayer is approached with strong concentration of thought, when the world is completely shut out, prayer often becomes intense. One just becomes deeply conscious of God's presence and deeply conscious of the needs of others and of the world. The believer begins to struggle for others, for the needs of the world. He draws near God and near those for whom he is praying. He senses that both God and others are ever so near. He loves God and loves those for whom he is praying — loves them ever so intensely. He wrestles with God for them, not because God is hard to reach and unconcerned and must be struggled against, but because he feels so much concern and so much love that he just pours out his heart to God. In the process, the prayer warrior is drawing much closer to God and gaining a much deeper concern for man! He is learning to love God more and to love man more, and this is exactly what God wants. God wants believers to be near Him and near others; to love God and others — to live both for God and for others; to be both God-centred and man-centred.

Just think of the impact upon this world — the enormous impact for good — if enough believers would become intercessors!

Note one other fact as well. God knew exactly what was going to happen to Sodom before this event with Abraham took place. He knew that Lot was the only righteous person in the city. What then was God's purpose in leading Abraham to intercede in prayer time and time again? God's purpose was at least threefold:

First, to teach Abraham — and all others who followed him — to become intercessors, prayer warriors, for both the righteous and wicked of the earth.

Second, to teach Abraham — and all others who followed him — that God's justice must be executed. Every human being will face the judgment of God.

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Third, to teach Abraham — and all others who followed him — to become stronger witnesses for Him. Abraham had been a strong witness to Lot and, no doubt, to his family. Abraham had taken Lot in as a child when Lot's father had died, treated him as a son, given him first choice of the land, and saved him from an invading army, risking his own life. But, Abraham was bound to think, after this experience of judgment upon Sodom, if he had been a stronger witness to Lot's family, perhaps some would have been saved.

Now, the subject of this great passage is: *Abraham Was Visited by God Himself (Part 2): Intercessory Faith — the Steps to Becoming an Intercessor, a Prayer Warrior*, Isaiah 18:16-33.

- I. Step 1: yearning to walk with God step by step, longing for His presence (v. 16).
- II. Step 2: thinking of God's great call and purpose for one's life (vv. 17-19).
- III. Step 3: sensing the pain of God's heart over wickedness (vv. 20-21).
- IV. Step 4: standing boldly before the Lord in prayer — refusing to leave the Lord's presence (vv. 22-26).
- V. Step 5: laying hold of the open access (door) into God's presence (vv. 27-28).
- VI. Step 6: continuing to pray and beseech God, praying on and on and never giving up (v. 29).
- VII. Step 7: persevering in concern and prayer (vv. 30-33).

### ***I. Genesis 18:16 Yearning to Walk with God Step by Step***

How does a person become an intercessor, a prayer warrior? 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 (Gen 18:1-8)
- a strong assurance of God's promises (Gen 18:10-14)
- a deep awareness of God's unlimited power (Gen 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.

***Thought 1.*** 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.

*Deut 4:29* But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all our heart and with all our soul.

*Psa 105:4* Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.

*Isa 55:6* Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.

*Jer 29:13* You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

*Luke 11:10* "For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."

*2 Cor 10:5* We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

## II. *Genesis 18:17–19 God's Great Call and Purpose for One's Life*

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 (see v. 23). Why? There are three reasons.

1. Abraham needed to think of his God-given call and purpose (v. 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 Saviour 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 (v. 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.

**Thought 1.** 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 Saviour 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.

**Luke 22:32** *“But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”*

**Eph 6:18** *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*

**1 Tim 2:1-2** *I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people; for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.*

**2 Pet 3:9** *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

### **III. Genesis 18:20–21 Sense the Pain of God's Heart over Wickedness**

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 long-suffering, not willing that any person should perish (2 Pet 3:9; 1 Tim 2:4; Eze 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 long-suffering 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 (Gen 14:1-16; 14:17-24); when Melchizedek, the priest of God, bore testimony to them (Gen 14:18-20); and through the testimony of Lot, weak as his witness was (2 Pet 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.

*2 Cor 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

*2 Th 1:7-8 And give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*

*Heb 9:27 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.*

*2 Pet 2:9 If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.*

*Jude 1:14-15 Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: “See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”*

#### **IV. Genesis 18:22–26 Standing Boldly Before the LORD in Prayer**

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.

**Thought 1.** 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.

**Heb 4:16** *Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

**Eph 3:12** *In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.*

**Heb 10:19** *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus.*

## V. *Genesis 18:27–28 Laying Hold of the Open Access into God’s Presence*

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.

**Thought 1.** 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.

*2 Chr 7:14* If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

*Isa 65:24* Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.

## VI. *Genesis 18:29 Continuing to Pray and Beseech God*

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.

**Thought 1.** The true intercessor refuses to give up. He continues to pray on and on. This is exactly what Scripture tells us to do.

*1 Chr 16:11* Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.

*Mat 7:7* “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

*Mat 26:41* “Watch [be sleepless] and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

## VII. *Genesis 18:30–33 Persevering in Concern and Prayer*

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 (v. 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 (v. 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 (v. 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. 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.

**Thought 1.** Scripture assures us: if we persevere in prayer, God will hear and answer.

**Luke 18:1** *Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.*

**Eph 6:18** *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*

**1 Th 5:17** *Pray continually.*

**James 5:13-14** *Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. ■*