

• *A model prayer-life*

• *Sustained and lengthy praying*

• *Angelic visitation*

One great aspect of the life of faith is prayer, and Abraham is a model in this respect as he is in almost every aspect of the Christian life.

Genesis 18:16–33 is the first lengthy prayer of the Bible, but it is not the first time prayer is mentioned. God spoke with man in the garden of Eden. Adam after the fall ^{☞1} and even Cain ^{☞2} both talked to God. Public worship began at an early stage of the human race ^{☞3} and Enoch kept up a continual fellowship with God that is called 'walking with God' ^{☞4}. God spoke to Abraham, and Abraham called on the name of Yahweh ^{☞5} and took specific matters to God in prayer ^{☞6}. He prayed a one-line prayer in Genesis 17:18 but now we see Abraham engaged in more sustained and lengthy praying.

The angels are on their way to Sodom. Three of them have visited Abraham and Sarah ^{☞1}; now two of them go on to Sodom ^{☞2} but the 'angel of Yahweh' stays behind. The 'angel of Yahweh' is God Himself manifesting Himself as an angel. This angel can be called 'God' because this manifestation is a special representation of God. Abraham is seeing the angels on their way ^{☞3}, and Yahweh is considering sharing His secret with Abraham, ^{☞4}. God has chosen him and has plans to bring him to a high level of godliness, in order to fulfil the promises that have been given through him ^{☞5}. God plans to investigate Sodom ^{☞6} and do whatever needs to be done ^{☞7}.

1. Intercession is part of leadership

1. Intercession is part of leadership. If Abraham is to be a great and significant figure in the story of salvation, then he must be an intercessor. All great leaders are great pray-ers. 'Intercessors' are never mentioned in the Bible as a special set of church officers. All Christians are to be intercessors and Christian leaders especially should have a warm heart towards the needs of others and should show their tenderness by being intercessors. God gives Abraham the opportunity to take the burden of a doomed city upon his own heart. Leaders are to be 'the people's representative before God' ^{☞1}. They 'bring their case' before the Lord ^{☞2}. This is the picture of great leaders throughout the Bible. ^{☞3}

2. Intercessory prayer is one of the most unselfish things you can ever do

2. Intercessory prayer is one of the most unselfish things you can ever do. Many aspects of serving God can be a little selfish. We enjoy ourselves and maybe we get a bit of appreciation. Preaching especially is rewarding and satisfying to those who are called to preach. But nothing is as unselfish as intercessory prayer! Abraham is not living in Sodom. The judgement of God that is about to fall will not in any way touch him. It is sheer unselfish generosity and goodness when he intercedes for the city.

3. Intercessory prayer is one of the most humble things you can ever do, if you do not mention it.

3. Intercessory prayer is one of the most humble things you can ever do, if you do not mention it. Many aspects of God's service are public, but intercession should be a fairly secret matter. An intercessor who publicizes that he or she is an intercessor is missing part of the blessing. You don't 'love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners' ^{☞1}. The reward comes when you 'go into your inner room, and when you have shut the door' ^{☞2}. Abraham was alone when he interceded for Sodom. Maybe he kept a diary and told the story eventually (for we now have the report in Genesis!) but at the time it was secret praying.

^{☞1} Genesis 3:12
^{☞2} 4:9
^{☞3} Genesis 4:26
^{☞4} Genesis 5:21–24

^{☞5} Genesis 12:1–3, 7; 13:4, 18

^{☞6} 15:2, 3

^{☞1} 18:1
^{☞2} 19:1

^{☞3} 18:16
^{☞4} 18:17
^{☞5} 18:18–19
^{☞6} 18:20–21
^{☞7} 18:20–21

^{☞1} Exodus 18:19, speaking of Moses

^{☞2} see Numbers 27:5

^{☞2} see Exodus 32:30–32; Deuteronomy 9:18–19; 1 Kings 13:6; 2 Kings 19:4; Jeremiah 7:16; 11:14; 14:11; John 17; Ephesians 1:15–19, and elsewhere

^{☞1} Matthew 6:5
^{☞2} Matthew 6:6

4. It is a very great privilege if God shares His prayer burden with you

• God takes and maintains the initiative

• God sometimes reveals something that could happen in order that we might pray that it will not happen

• God determines when the praying should end

4. It is a very great privilege if God shares His prayer burden with you. As Abraham is saying farewell to the three angelic guests, God is considering the possibility of sharing His burden with His friend Abraham. He is a very hospitable person and is escorting his guests as they leave (18:16). One of the angels is especially representing God. God Himself is appearing as an angel. No one can actually see God but angels can represent God visually.

One aspect of the mystery of prayer is the way in which God always maintains the initiative. The angels go on their way but the angel of God stays behind. The narrative is compressed but we are clearly meant to understand that God puts the matter to Abraham. Then Abraham starts pleading for mercy for the city of Sodom on account of the righteous people who might be in it. God puts a matter to Abraham and waits to see what he will do. This is the way it is when we are 'praying in the Holy Spirit'. God takes the initiative. He puts things before us by the Holy Spirit and waits to see what we shall do.

God may share secrets with us. He may give us a foreknowledge of what is about to happen. When God does this it is not always that we might tell out to the world what He is about to do. When God gives us this high privilege the purpose is often that we might pray. Sometimes God can reveal something that **could** happen in order that we might pray that it will not happen ^{□1}.

God also stays in control of the praying. He stays there before Abraham as long as He wishes to, while Abraham is interceding ^{□1}, and then God 'finished speaking with Abraham' and 'departed'. Notice it does not say 'Abraham finished talking with God'; it says God finished speaking with Abraham. This is part of the mystery of prayer. Although we are doing the praying, it is still true that God is mysteriously in control of it. This is part of what it means to pray 'in the Spirit'. He puts before us the subject to be prayed about. And He is in control at the beginning, in the middle and He determines when the praying should end.

^{□1} as in Amos 7:1-3

^{□1} 18:22-32

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