

Abraham: The Father of the Faithful, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 7: Bold Before God: Interceding for Sodom

Genesis 18:16–33

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Genesis 18:16–33 records the first sustained intercessory prayer in Scripture, and it grows directly out of the friendship God extends to Abraham. The historical setting is the eve of Sodom's destruction; the three visitors who announced Isaac now turn toward the city, and God deliberately chooses not to hide His plans from Abraham. The reason God gives, "I have known him," is the language of covenant intimacy, and it stands behind the title Scripture later gives Abraham: the friend of God (James 2:23; 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8), a theme Lesson 11 will develop. The passage teaches that God draws near to those who walk with Him, and that such nearness overflows into bold intercession for others.

Doctrinally, the lesson presses several truths. It displays God's justice: He is the Judge of all the earth who will always do right and will not destroy the righteous with the wicked. It displays His mercy and His willingness to be entreated, sparing a city for the sake of a righteous remnant. And it models prayer that is at once bold and humble, persistent yet reverent. The teacher should be careful not to misframe this as Abraham wearing God down or changing an unwilling God's mind; God Himself initiated the disclosure, and His heart was already merciful. Intercession is the privilege of joining God in His own merciful purposes, not a tool for manipulating Him.

The doctrinal climax (Question 9) holds God's justice and mercy together. Sodom lacked even ten righteous, and judgment fell, yet God still mercifully rescued Lot for Abraham's sake. This points beyond itself: where ten righteous could not be found to save a city, the one truly Righteous One, Christ, becomes the ground on which God justly spares sinners, and He ever lives to intercede for us (Hebrews 7:25). Pastorally, aim to draw students into a closer friendship with God, to make them bold and persistent intercessors for others (including the difficult and undeserving), and to settle their hearts in the perfect justice and mercy of God.

Question 1

Student Question:

Before announcing judgment, God said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" and explained, "I have known him" (vv. 17–19). What does it reveal about the relationship God offers, the kind of friendship later named in James 2:23, that He takes Abraham into His confidence, and why does God share His purposes with those who walk closely with Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Let the class feel the intimacy of God's question. The Almighty pauses and decides not to act in Abraham's world without telling him. This is not how a distant deity treats a subject; it is how a friend treats a friend. Jesus draws the same line in John 15:15: servants do not know what their master is doing, but "I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."

Explain the phrase "I have known him." It speaks of covenant intimacy and chosen relationship, not mere awareness. Out of this nearness God acts. The same verse adds God's purpose: that Abraham would "command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD." God's friendship with Abraham was tied to a life and a household devoted to His ways, and to a purpose that would bless the world.

Connect to the later title. James 2:23 says Abraham "was called a friend of God," echoed in 2 Chronicles 20:7 and Isaiah 41:8. Lesson 11 will explore how that friendship was bound up with an obedient faith. For now, establish that God genuinely offers friendship to those who walk with Him, and that He shares His heart with His friends.

Apply it as invitation. The same God offers this nearness to us in Christ. He is not a distant force to be appeased but a Father who welcomes His people into His confidence through His Word and Spirit. Many believers have never imagined that God wants closeness like this; let the passage enlarge their expectation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's friendship and covenant intimacy with those who walk with Him
- Jesus calling His disciples friends and revealing the Father's heart (John 15:15)
- Abraham, the friend of God (James 2:23; 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8)
- Friendship tied to a household devoted to God's ways and a purpose of blessing

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that God would not hide His plans from Abraham?
- How does Jesus extend this same friendship in John 15:15?
- Why does God share His heart with those who walk closely with Him?

Question 2

Student Question:

God related to Abraham as a friend who shares His heart, not merely as a distant ruler. Be honest about how you relate to God: as a friend you walk and talk with, or as a distant authority you approach only when you need something? What is one way you could cultivate real closeness with Him this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Invite honest self-assessment. Many sincere believers relate to God almost entirely transactionally: they approach Him when they need something and otherwise keep their distance. The friendship God offered Abraham exposes how thin that can be.

Distinguish reverence from distance. Friendship with God never means casualness or irreverence; Abraham held both nearness and the awareness that he was dust and ashes. The goal is not to shrink God to a buddy but to draw near to the holy God who genuinely invites us close.

Make it practical. Closeness with God grows the way any friendship grows: through regular, unhurried time together, honest conversation, listening, and shared life. Encourage the class to name one concrete habit, time in the Word with a listening heart, unhurried prayer, walking through the day in conscious fellowship, that would deepen friendship with God this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Transactional versus relational ways of relating to God
- Holding reverence and nearness together, as Abraham did
- Friendship with God grown through regular, honest fellowship
- A concrete habit to deepen closeness

Discussion Prompts

- Do you relate to God more as a friend or as a distant authority?
- How do reverence and friendship belong together?
- What one habit could deepen your friendship with God this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Rather than stepping back from the coming judgment, Abraham “drew near” and began to intercede, appealing to God’s own justice (vv. 22–25). What does this teach about the privilege of intercessory prayer, and about the right posture for it, a boldness that comes near combined with a humility that knows its place before God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Notice the direction Abraham moves: he draws near. Faced with imminent judgment, he does not retreat into self-protection; he steps toward God to plead for others. Intercession is the movement of a heart that cares about more than itself, and it is a genuine privilege, an invitation to participate in God’s dealings with the world.

Hold together the two strands of Abraham’s posture. He is astonishingly bold, daring to question and to press the Judge of all the earth. Yet he is deeply humble, calling himself dust and ashes

and asking that the Lord not be angry. True intercession is neither timid silence nor presumptuous demand; it is bold humility, coming near with confidence while knowing exactly who we are before God.

Show that Abraham's boldness rests on God's character, not his own merit. He appeals not to his worthiness but to God's justice: surely the Judge of all the earth will do right. Confident prayer is grounded in who God is and what He has revealed, not in our deserving. This is why we can pray boldly, because of God, not because of us.

Apply it to the believer's prayer life. Many of us pray timidly, as if God were reluctant, or carelessly, as if He owed us. Abraham models a better way: drawing near in earnest, appealing to God's character, and pressing our requests with reverent confidence. For us, such boldness is doubly grounded, for we come through Christ (Hebrews 4:16).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Intercession as the privilege of caring for others before God
- Bold humility: drawing near with confidence while knowing our place
- Boldness grounded in God's character, not our merit
- Confident access to God, for us through Christ (Hebrews 4:16)

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it significant that Abraham drew near rather than stepping back?
- How can prayer be both bold and humble at the same time?
- What is your boldness in prayer actually grounded in?

Question 4

Student Question:

Abraham's closeness with God overflowed into bold prayer for others, even for a wicked city where his nephew lived. Who are the people, including difficult or undeserving ones, that God is calling you to intercede for? What holds you back from praying for them boldly and persistently?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Press the outward direction of Abraham's prayer. He used his nearness to God not to secure advantages for himself but to plead for others, including people who, by any measure, did not deserve it. Intercession is love on its knees, and it stretches even to the undeserving.

Help the class name actual people. Ask them to think of the difficult relative, the hostile coworker, the wayward friend, the enemy, the lost neighbor. Jesus commands us to pray even for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44), which is exactly the kind of prayer Abraham models toward Sodom.

Name what holds us back: indifference, the sense that some people are beyond hope, unforgiveness, or simply forgetfulness. Encourage each person to commit to interceding regularly for one or two specific people God has laid on their heart, especially someone they would rather write off.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Intercession reaching even the difficult and undeserving
- Praying for enemies and persecutors (Matthew 5:44)
- What hinders us: indifference, hopelessness, unforgiveness
- Committing to regular prayer for specific people

Discussion Prompts

- Whom is God calling you to intercede for, including someone difficult?
- What holds you back from praying for them?
- How might regular intercession change your heart toward them?

Question 5

Student Question:

At the heart of Abraham's plea is the question, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (v. 25). What does this reveal about God as the righteous Judge who will never sweep away the righteous with the wicked, and how does His justice actually give us confidence rather than fear?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Center on Abraham's great confidence: God will do what is right. He does not fear that God might be unjust; he is so sure of God's justice that he builds his whole appeal on it. The Judge of all the earth cannot do wrong; it is contrary to His nature.

Draw out the comfort of divine justice. We often think of God's justice as something to dread, but for those who trust Him it is a deep reassurance. A world with a perfectly just Judge means evil will not have the last word, wrongs will be righted, and no one will be treated unfairly by God. Justice is good news when the Judge is perfectly righteous.

Clarify what God's justice does and does not promise. It does not promise that the righteous never suffer in this life; Scripture is honest that they often do. It promises that God Himself always acts rightly and will finally set all things right. This guards against both cynicism (God doesn't care about justice) and presumption (God owes me an easy life now).

Anchor it in worship. The proper response to the justice of God is trust and reverence. We can leave the final reckoning in His hands precisely because His hands are perfectly just, which frees us from both vengeance and despair (Romans 12:19).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God as the perfectly righteous Judge who always does right
- Divine justice as comfort, not only dread, for those who trust Him
- Justice does not promise present ease but a final setting-right
- Leaving final judgment to God frees us from vengeance and despair (Romans 12:19)

Discussion Prompts

- Why is a perfectly just Judge actually good news?
- What does God's justice promise, and what does it not promise?
- How does trusting God's justice free you from carrying vengeance?

Question 6

Student Question:

Abraham rested his whole appeal on his confidence that God always does what is right. When life feels unfair, or when you see the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer, do you trust that the Judge of all the earth will do right? Where do you most need to rest in God's perfect justice rather than your own sense of fairness?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Acknowledge the real struggle. The apparent prosperity of the wicked and suffering of the righteous has troubled believers throughout Scripture (Psalm 73; Habakkuk 1). The question is honest, and the class should feel free to admit where God's justice seems delayed or absent.

Point to the resolution Scripture offers. Psalm 73 finds peace not by explaining away the tension but by entering God's presence and seeing the end of the matter. Trusting God's justice means trusting His timing and His final reckoning, even when the present looks crooked.

Make it personal. Ask where each person is currently tempted to take justice into their own hands, to grow bitter, or to conclude that God does not see. Invite them to hand that specific situation back to the Judge of all the earth and to rest in His perfect righteousness rather than their own limited sense of fairness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The honest struggle when the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer (Psalm 73; Habakkuk)
- Peace found in God's presence and His final reckoning
- Trusting God's timing and justice over our own sense of fairness

- Handing specific injustices back to the righteous Judge

Discussion Prompts

- Where does life's unfairness most test your trust in God's justice?
- How does Psalm 73 model finding peace in that struggle?
- What situation do you need to hand back to the Judge of all the earth?

Question 7

Student Question:

Abraham kept pressing his request, from fifty down to ten, yet always humbly: "I who am but dust and ashes," "let not the Lord be angry" (vv. 27–32). What does this persistent yet humble bargaining teach about God's patience, His willingness to be entreated, and the kind of persevering prayer Jesus later commends (Luke 18:1–8)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Marvel at God's patience through six rounds of asking. Each time Abraham presses further, God answers yes, and never once rebukes him for asking again. This patient willingness to be entreated tells us something tender about God: He welcomes the persistent prayers of those who walk with Him.

Correct a possible misunderstanding. Abraham is not wearing down a reluctant God or changing the mind of an unwilling deity. God Himself opened the conversation by revealing His plans; His heart was already merciful. Abraham's persistence draws him deeper into God's own merciful purposes; it does not manufacture mercy in a God who lacked it. Hold this carefully so the class does not treat prayer as leverage over God.

Connect to Jesus' teaching on persistence. In Luke 18:1–8 Jesus tells the parable of the persistent widow to teach that we "ought always to pray and not lose heart." God is not the unjust judge; He is far better, and He delights to answer His people. Persistent prayer is not nagging an indifferent God but the steady faith of those who keep coming.

Hold persistence and humility together. Abraham presses boldly yet never forgets he is dust and ashes. Persistence without humility becomes demanding; humility without persistence becomes passivity. The believer is called to keep asking, with both confidence and lowliness, trusting God's goodness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's patience and willingness to be entreated
- Persistence that joins God's merciful purposes, not leverage over Him
- Jesus' call to pray always and not lose heart (Luke 18:1–8)

- Holding persistence and humility together in prayer

Discussion Prompts

- What does God's patience through six requests tell us about Him?
- Why is persistent prayer not the same as wearing God down?
- How do persistence and humility balance each other in prayer?

Question 8

Student Question:

Most of us give up praying about something long before God has finished answering. What is a prayer you have abandoned too soon, or a person you stopped interceding for because it seemed to make no difference? How does Abraham's persistence challenge you to keep coming back to God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Name the common experience of abandoned prayer. We pray for a while, see no change, and quietly stop, concluding it makes no difference. Help the class recall the specific prayers and people they have given up on.

Reframe apparent silence. God's timing is not ours, and the absence of visible answers is not the absence of God's working. Abraham's example, and Jesus' parable, both insist that we keep coming, trusting that God hears and acts in His way and time.

Encourage renewed perseverance. Invite each person to take up again a prayer they abandoned, or to recommit to interceding for someone they stopped praying for. Suggest practical helps: a prayer list, a regular time, praying with another believer, so persistence becomes a sustained habit rather than a momentary resolve.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The common drift of abandoned prayer
- Apparent silence is not the absence of God's working
- Recommitting to persistent intercession
- Practical helps for sustained prayer

Discussion Prompts

- What prayer have you given up on too soon?
- Whom did you stop interceding for, and why?
- What would help you persevere in prayer this time?

Question 9

Student Question:

Abraham appealed to God to spare a whole city for the sake of a righteous few, yet not even ten righteous were found, and judgment came (though God still rescued Lot, Genesis 19:29). How does this passage hold together God's perfect justice and His abundant mercy, what does it teach about the value of the righteous in a sinful world, and how does it point us to the one truly Righteous One, Christ, who ever lives to intercede for us (Hebrews 7:25) and for whose sake God justly spares sinners?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This heaviest block weaves justice, mercy, and Christ together, so move through it in order. Begin with how justice and mercy meet in the passage. God's justice is real: Sodom lacked even ten righteous, and judgment fell. God's mercy is also real: He was willing to spare the entire wicked city for the sake of as few as ten righteous people. Both are on full display, and neither cancels the other. The God of this passage is perfectly just and astonishingly merciful at once.

Draw out the value of the righteous in a sinful world. God's willingness to spare a city for ten righteous people teaches that the presence of the godly is a preserving mercy to the world around them. Jesus calls His people the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13–16); the righteous are a restraining, preserving presence. This should both dignify the faithful and sober us about a world emptied of them.

Mark the mercy that persisted even in judgment. Though ten righteous were not found, Genesis 19:29 says God "remembered Abraham" and brought Lot out of the catastrophe. Abraham's intercession was not wasted; it bore fruit in the rescue of the one righteous man who was there. Mercy reached into the very heart of judgment.

Now lift the class to Christ, reverently. Where ten righteous could not be found to save a city, the gospel announces that one truly Righteous One, Jesus Christ, has come, and for His sake God justly spares guilty sinners. At the cross, God's justice and mercy meet fully: He is "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). Abraham's bold intercession is a faint preview of the perfect intercession of Christ, who "always lives to make intercession" for those who draw near to God through Him (Hebrews 7:25). The Friend of God interceded for Sodom; the Son of God intercedes for us still.

Guard against two errors as you close. Do not let the passage suggest universal rescue apart from response; Sodom was judged, and Scripture is clear that judgment is real for the impenitent. And do not let it suggest that our prayers manipulate God; God's mercy was His own initiative, and our intercession joins His purposes rather than overrides His will. The lesson is that the just and merciful God invites His friends to plead for a perishing world, and that He has provided, in Christ, the one Righteous One through whom He can justly save.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's perfect justice and abundant mercy held together
- The righteous as a preserving presence: salt and light (Matthew 5:13–16)
- Mercy reaching into judgment: God remembered Abraham and rescued Lot (Genesis 19:29)
- Christ the one Righteous One for whose sake God justly spares sinners (Romans 3:26)
- Christ's ongoing intercession for those who draw near through Him (Hebrews 7:25)
- Guarding against universalism and against treating prayer as manipulation of God

Discussion Prompts

- How are God's justice and mercy both fully displayed in this passage?
- What does sparing a city for ten righteous teach about the value of the godly?
- How does the search for ten righteous point us to the one Righteous One, Christ?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole passage. You have seen God befriend Abraham and share His heart, and you have seen Abraham draw near to plead boldly, humbly, and persistently for others. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through this part of Abraham's story. Where is He calling you into deeper friendship with God and into faithful intercession for others this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Press for one concrete response. Some need to move from a distant, transactional faith toward real friendship with God; some need to take up bold intercession for a specific person; some need to rest in God's justice; some need to persevere in a prayer they abandoned. Let each name their own.

Point to Christ as both pattern and mediator. Jesus is the Friend of sinners who drew near to a perishing world and now ever lives to intercede for us. Being formed into His image means growing in nearness to God and in love that prays for others, even the undeserving. And our intercession is heard not because of our worthiness but because of His.

End with encouragement. The God who welcomed Abraham's bold prayers welcomes ours, through Christ. The class can step into the week as friends of God and intercessors for others, confident that He hears.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving toward deeper friendship with God and faithful intercession
- Christ the Friend of sinners and our ongoing intercessor
- Being formed into a praying, others-centered love
- Confidence that God hears our prayers through Christ

Discussion Prompts

- What single step toward friendship with God do you most need this week?
- Whom will you commit to intercede for?
- How does Christ's intercession give you confidence as you pray?