

The Intercessor

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Preacher: Gabriel Wong

[0:00] We're back in the book of Genesis this week, continuing on Abraham, and we've been talking about the theme of waiting in faith. And actually talking to all of you guys, it's been great hearing your reflections on this topic.

I think we can all relate to the topic of waiting, to the anxiety, the disappointment that comes with it, or the itch to do it ourselves when we're waiting. We left off midway through Genesis chapter 18 last week.

And there, in the middle of their waiting, God finally gave Abraham and Sarah a timeline, that he will return this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.

That's where we left off. And James shared last week this quote, that waiting time is not wasting time. That waiting time is not wasting time. And because it's in those 24 years, Abraham, in his waiting, he grew in intimacy with God.

He grew to know God in the waiting. And that intimacy, the relationship and access to God that we have, that's what we're going to focus on today. The access, relationship, intimacy we have with God.

[1:08] Now, when I was in university, I did an internship at this tech company in California. And every now and then, we'd have like a big all-hands company meeting where the CEO would come up and say a few words, show his face, and just generic corporate things.

So one time, the CEO said this. He said, you know, my door is always open to you. If you knock, my door is open. I'm always available. But I was skeptical.

I was sitting with some other interns and we thought, no way. He's just saying this. That's just corporate speak. You know, they always say these things, but they never mean it. So I won't believe it unless I go and test this.

Let's test him. So a bunch of us interns, we decided on the last day of our internship, because we were scared like if anything went wrong, we were just going to go to the CEO's door and knock and see if he stands by his word that if we knock, his door is open.

So we snuck upstairs to his office and then we stood outside the door and we're like, so who's going to knock? You knock. No, you knock. Because we were all checking him out a bit because we're interns.

[2:20] He's the CEO. He's busy. He's got lots of things to do. He doesn't care about us. But anyways, when we finally got courage to do that, to knock on his door, we were surprised that he was actually quite friendly.

He invited us into his office and we had this pleasant, it was just a short 10 minute chat with him. He was pretty surprised that we actually came to find him, but he was actually pretty friendly and he stood by his word.

But I realized that we often treat God the same way that maybe my friends and I, our interns, we treated that CEO. We know that God's door is always open, but maybe we think that he's got all these 8 billion people to care about.

He's got galaxies to spin, planets that he needs to keep in orbit. He's too high up to care about my problems. Will he listen to me? Because what right does someone like me have to go and stand before God?

Unlike the story I shared, our access to God is even better. We don't have to be afraid to approach God. We can boldly go to him, not just as an intern going to CEO, but as a child going to a father, as a friend going to a friend.

[3:32] And we see this in the second half of Genesis 18. Here, God has some pretty difficult news to share with Abraham. It's some pretty heavy news that he will go and destroy Sodom and

Gomorrah.

God is going to rain down fire upon Sodom and Gomorrah. But we see in this, Abraham has the privilege to pray boldly, to go to God, stand between God and Sodom and intercede on their behalf. Pray to God for mercy. Because Abraham is someone known by God, in relationship with God, he has the ability to plead with God to spare the two cities. And we'll see that's the same for us.

We, as friends of God, have the privilege to pray to him, the righteous judge of all the earth, because we also have a perfect intercessor. We have that privilege to go to him.

And so we'll read from Genesis 18, verses 16 to 33. We normally stand, but I won't ask you to do that because we're on Zoom. You can if you want to, but I'll read for us from Genesis 18, verses 16 to 33.

[4:40] Then the men set out from there, and they looked down towards Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. The Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?

Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. For I have chosen him that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised to him.

Then the Lord said, Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me.

And if not, I will know. So the men turned from there and went towards Sodom. But Abraham still stood before the Lord. Then Abraham drew near and said, Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?

Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked.

[5:54] Far be that from you. Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just? And the Lord said, If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.

Abraham answered and said, Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. I who am but dust and ashes, suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking.

Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five? And he said, I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there. Again he spoke to him and said, Suppose forty are found there.

He answered, For the sake of forty I will not do it. Then he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there. He answered, I will not do it if I find thirty there.

He said, Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there. He answered, For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it. Then he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry and I will speak again but this once.

[6:55] Suppose ten are found there. He answered, For the sake of ten I will not destroy it. And the Lord went his way when he had finished speaking to Abraham. And Abraham returned to his place.

This is the word of the Lord. Yeah, so first thing we see here in this passage is that we have access to God in relation to God as friends of God.

We'll pick up from verse 16 here. It says, Then the men set out from there and they looked down towards Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. Now who are these men? We heard last week that the Lord, that's the personal name for God, Yahweh, the Lord, personally visited Abraham and shared a meal with him.

We talked about Abraham's hospitality last week to his guests. Abraham prepared bread, yogurt, slaughtered a calf, had beef for his visitors. And when you meet up with your friends, what do you normally say?

[7:55] We ask them, Let's grab lunch. Let's get dinner. Let's get coffee. Because food brings people together. And we can't do it today, unfortunately. But that's why we normally go to the 14th floor.

We bring our takeout up there and share a meal. We share a meal together after service every week. Abraham shared a meal with the Lord. That's the relationship they had. And that brings us to the next verse, verse 17 also.

So the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Now notice how God phrases this. He doesn't say, Shall I tell Abraham?

Shall I tell him what I'm about to do? He says it differently. Shall I hide from Abraham? It's as if Abraham had this right to know what God was about to do. And shall I hide it from him?

So for example, today, Jojo, my wife, is in Thailand with her brother-in-law. With her brother, my brother-in-law. So I'm sharing this with you guys.

[8:54] She could share this with you guys. But she wouldn't go and say, Shall I hide from the church that I'm going to Thailand? Because, you know, as much as we're one family, we want to get to know one another. There's no expectation that we share every detail with your life.

We might choose to do that. But if she went to Thailand and didn't tell me that one day I just woke up and she was gone in Thailand, I'd be pretty surprised. And we have that relationship, that closeness and intimacy where that default is to share.

And so then the question is, Shall I hide what I'm about to do? And Abraham had that closeness, intimacy with God. And that's why in the Bible, for example, James chapter 2, verse 23, Abraham is called a friend of God.

He's a friend of God. And that closeness, that friendship, relationship exists because God chose to make a covenant with Abraham. God said, Shall I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do?

And in verse 19, For I have chosen him. I've chosen to make him a great nation, make his descendants more numerous than the stars. I've chosen him. That closeness comes from the fact that God chose to make a covenant with Abraham.

[10:09] And that word chosen in verse 19 also carries that sense of being known. Being known, there's this footnote in your Bibles about that. The Lord is saying, I know Abraham.

I've chosen him personally. Shall I hide this from him? That's the closeness they have. And for us, if we know Christ, if we know Jesus, the same is true for us.

We have this relationship with God. In John chapter 15, Jesus says, No longer do I call you servants, but I have called you friends. For all that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you.

You did not choose me, but I chose you. We are friends of God, adopted as children of God, because we're chosen by him. We're known by him and have a close and intimate relationship with him.

The CEO, when I knocked on his door, I mentioned he was friendly for a 10-minute chat. He was willing to entertain us that one time. But I bet you, if we tried to pull that off the second time, third time, fourth time, he'd tell us to knock it off.

[11:14] At some point, he'd say, Stop wasting my time because you have nothing important to say to me. But God isn't like that. He's not just our boss who's way high up.

He knows our name. He's happy when we come to him. And he doesn't just slot us in for a quick 10-minute meeting. He invites us. He wants us there with him for all eternity.

He wants us to know him. That's the access we have to God. We are friends of God and children of God. But God brings some heavy news to his friend.

That judgment is coming to Sodom and Gomorrah. See, the Lord is a personal, intimate, friendly God. But at the same time, he is also the holy, righteous judge of all the earth.

Sometimes God promises us blessing. He says to Abraham, You will have a child next year.

Throughout this time next year, I will return. Sarah will have a son. Also, God discloses punishment.

[12:15] He will destroy Sodom on account of their grievous sin. And we won't get into the weeds of what Sodom's sin is today. It's more clear in the next chapter. But today, we will just see that God deals with sin.

And when he does, his punishment is just. In verse 20, the Lord says that he will go down and see if Sodom's sin is as bad as the outcry that comes to him.

It's strange that God says that because we know that God knows everything. He is omniscient. He already knows what's going on in Sodom. He knows what's going on. He's also omnipresent.

He is everywhere. He doesn't need to take a stroll down to Sodom to take a look. He already knows what's going on in Sodom. But God says he will go down and see.

God says this to show to Abraham that his justice is careful. It's not arbitrary. It's not by just an emotional decision.

[13:17] His judgment doesn't come based on a whim. God is, when it comes to justice, he's measured and deliberate. Even reluctant to bring punishment. Punishes sin, but he drags his feet to do it.

He's a God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. And just as there's judgment for Sodom, that God warns Abraham judgment is coming for Sodom.

The Bible also says that a day is coming when Jesus will return and judge the world. And 2 Thessalonians were warned that a day is coming when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels and flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might. This is the heavy truth.

But this is the word of God. And we have a choice to make. We can hear this and choose to walk away and say, I will never worship a God like that. I can't wrap my head around how a God like that can love us.

[14:29] I encourage us to follow instead in Abraham's footsteps. He doesn't fully understand. He doesn't see the full picture, but he trusts his friend. He trusts the God that he's walked with for 24 years.

And he holds on to God's goodness. We see that in verse 25. He trusts. Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just? Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just?

That's what Abraham believes. God's justice move Abraham, not to turn away from God, but to run towards God and pray and intercede for Sodom.

Abraham doesn't doubt God's goodness. Instead, he appeals to it. He appeals to God's heart. And for that reason, Abraham begins to pray. He prays to intercede for Sodom, to plead for mercy for Sodom.

And that's what we see next, that we have access to God in prayer, to the righteous judge in prayer. Look at verse 24. It says, So the man turned from there and went towards Sodom, but Abraham stood still before the Lord.

[15:37] Then Abraham drew near. He drew near. That's essentially what prayer is, to draw near to God and speak with him. And like Abraham, we have that privilege to draw near, to approach God and pray.

Abraham demonstrates for us here a good posture for prayer. He prays with bold reverence, with bold reverence. He's both reverent and he's bold. He's reverent.

He has this healthy fear of God. He respects God. He knows who God is and who he is. He says in verse 27, Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord.

I who am but dust and ashes. God is the creator. We are his creation. We're sinful human beings standing before a holy creator. The gap between us and God is like the gap between an intern and a CEO, but infinitely greater than that.

And so what right does Abraham have to make any demands from God? Abraham approaches with reverence. At the same time, Abraham is bold.

[16:42] He's bold because of the relationship and friendship, that intimacy he has with God. He knows that he has a way to God. The door is open to his father and friend.

And so Abraham, he draws near to God to intercede for Sodom and plead for mercy on their behalf. In verse 23, Abraham asks God, Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?

Suppose there are 50 righteous in the city. Will you sweep away the place and not spare it for the 50 righteous who are in it? Abraham approaches God boldly. He asks, if there are 50 people, 50 righteous people, can you have mercy on the city?

But he goes further than that. He doesn't just stop at 50. And when we hear this, it almost sounds like a negotiation. It sounds like Abraham is haggling on carousel. He's trying to negotiate the price down. You know, 50 down to 45, 40, 30, 20, 10.

And at the end, God agrees to spare this whole city of Sodom, this wicked city, if he can find just 10 righteous people in it. If there are 10 righteous people, he will spare the city.

[17:51] That's the result of Abraham boldly going to God in prayer. However, on carousel, the difference is when you're haggling, we compromise to meet in the middle.

Right? If you want to sell something for 50, I ought to buy for 40. We might split the difference and sell for 45. We'll meet in the middle. But every time Abraham asks God, look what God says.

He just grants the request. There's no pushback. There's no counteroffer. It's just yes. So here, this isn't a negotiation. This is different from what we do on carousel.

God is allowing Abraham, God is inviting Abraham to come to him and ask him for what's on God's heart. He's inviting Abraham to intercede, not to twist God's will to do something God doesn't want him to do.

God doesn't want to do. He's inviting Abraham to come to know the great mercy, the depths of the mercy in God's heart, God's compassion for the city of Sodom and to intercede and pray in line with God's heart.

[19:02] Abraham is able to pray with boldness because he's praying on the basis of God's character. He's a friend of God. He knows who God is and appeals to his heart.

Abraham knows God is just. In verse 25, it says, Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked. Far be that from you shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just.

Abraham knows God is just. He talks about justice. But notice also he's appealing to God's mercy, not just justice, but mercy. Because even if there were just 10 righteous people in the city, God could do something else.

He could just take them out of the city and destroy everything else. He could save the righteous, destroy the wicked. God would be just to do that. But we see that God's justice and mercy are wrapped together.

God is merciful in his judgment. That's God's heart. His heart is one that is slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and mercy. Abraham knows who God is, so he can pray boldly.

[20:10] And for us, the question is then, do we know the heart of God? Do we have such intimacy with him, closeness with him, that his heart becomes our heart and that we're moved to pray for the things that he cares about?

Do we care for the lost? Do we have the same compassion that drove the father to send Christ to die for us? For those who are lost? Do we care about those who have no hope without the cross of Christ?

Are we concerned for the poor and oppressed? And actually part of Sodom's sin, it says in Ezekiel 16, is that they had pride, excess of food, prosperous seas, but did not aid the poor and needy.

It's fitting that we just talked about KFCC. There's things that we can do to care for those in need. Do we care for those who are marginalized and mistreated? If we find our prayer lives weak and stale, I wonder if it's because we're drifting away from the heart of God.

If our prayers are only things like, God, help me with this exam. Give me good grades. Help me to have that promotion so that I can make more money. Take it easy. Enjoy life. It's understandable why we might not be so bold to pray.

[21:26] But we can pray with conviction when we know that what's on our heart, what we ask for, what's the deepest desire of our hearts aligns with what God wants, what his promises are, and are backed by his revelation about himself.

And one way to do that is to root our prayers in scripture, in what God says about himself, about his heart, and what he promises us. We know God desires all to be saved.

It's all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. That everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. He does not delight in the death of the wicked. And so we can pray for our family, for our friends who don't know God.

I had the privilege to experience this at Young Life Camp two weeks ago or the last week where I can share so many stories.

We'll save that for another time of how God showed up, of how half the camp were unchurched kids. But maybe two-thirds of them stood up on the last day and said, I experienced God in some way.

[22:30] Or 20 students came to the front and said, I've decided to follow Jesus. I want to commit my life to Jesus. We see the fruit of what God is doing at the camp. But behind the scenes, on the third night, after the gospel is preached, I also had the privilege, along with all the camp leaders, all the adults, to go outside and intercede, pray to God on behalf of these kids.

Open their eyes, shine light into their dark hearts, help them to see Jesus. I have the privilege to pray according to God's heart, knowing that God loves these children, and then see him bring the fruit.

It is a privilege to pray to God, knowing his heart, and to see him work and fulfill his promises. And we know also, every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth. Every tribe, nation, and tongue will worship him. We can pray for his gospel to reach the ends of the earth, knowing that he will fulfill his promise. We can have boldness to pray when we're praying in line with God's will and what's on his heart.

That's the privilege and access we have to God in prayer. And we can learn from Abraham's example. He did what was right in his prayer.

[23:47] He was bold. He interceded for Sodom. Abraham did well. He did what he could. But we'll also see next week, it wasn't enough. Because we know how the story ends.

God agreed to everything Abraham asked for, but he couldn't even find 10 righteous people in Sodom. And so, what happens is God destroyed the city.

He rained down fire from heaven and destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham was a friend of God, chosen by God, known by God, but his prayers weren't enough.

His intercession wasn't enough. And if Abraham couldn't do it, this man of faith, the prototypical example of faith, then what hope do we have?

What hope is there for sinners who have transgressed a holy God? What hope is there for us knowing that a day of judgment is coming? And we see in Genesis that if it depends on us to pray, if it depends on the strength of our faith, if it depends on our righteousness, that God can find 10 righteous people in this world, then we are completely lost and hopeless.

[24:56] Our only hope is that we have someone better than Abraham who is interceding for us. Our only hope is that we have a perfect intercessor whose name is Jesus, who is not only a friend of God, but also the one and only son of God.

And he intercedes and pleads to God on our behalf. Abraham went down to 10 people. He asked God, for the sake of 10 righteous people, do not destroy them.

Why did Abraham stop at 10? I'm not totally sure. There are some answers I could give, but Jesus doesn't stop at 10. Jesus doesn't stop at 10 because he knows there aren't 10 righteous people in this world.

Jesus is more bold than Abraham. Abraham, he intercedes and brings God all the way down to zero. Jesus looks at us and knows that none is righteous. No, not one.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And he pleads with the father. Do not destroy them. Not for the sake of 10, but do not destroy them. Have mercy for the sake of none.

[26:03] For zero. Jesus says, do not destroy them, not for their sake, but for the sake of the one person standing before you. Your perfect righteous son.

He stands in the middle between a holy God and us sinful people to intercede for us. Abraham asked God to spare the righteous. But Jesus asked God to spare the guilty by covering them in his righteousness.

Abraham asked God to hold back his wrath. Don't destroy them. But Jesus says, actually, let your wrath fall on me. Let the fire fall on me instead.

He took our place and let that fault punishment land on himself. On the cross, he was able to say, forgive them, father. Only because he also said, it is finished.

And then breathed his last breath. And there's one more difference. Even if Abraham could intercede for Sodom, one day Abraham died. Even if Abraham's prayers went off, Abraham died.

[27:08] He said he's but dust to ashes. And he returned to dust and ashes. One day Abraham's prayers would stop. But after dying on the cross, Jesus was raised from the dead.

God raised him from the dead. Death could not hold him. It is impossible for death to hold him. And Hebrews 7 says, because Jesus lives forever, he is the guarantor of a better covenant.

And Jesus is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. Jesus didn't just die, but he rose from the dead.

And right now, he is pleading with God on our behalf. When we sin, when we fail, when we forget to pray, Jesus is our perfect intercessor.

And because he lives, we're fully reconciled to God and have access to God forever. And so, we have this access to God. It's not like we don't have to approach God like interns timidly, nervously knocking on the CEO's door, thinking he's busy.

[28:10] He won't listen to us. That's not the case between us and God. Through Jesus, that door has been thrown wide open. The veil is torn for all eternity. By his blood, we have that privilege to

draw near to God Almighty as friends, as children of God, adopted as sons, as co-heirs with Christ. We are known by him, chosen by him, and we can walk directly into the arms of our father. And so, why don't we make use of that privilege? Let's draw near to God and pray, knowing God's heart. The outcome might not always be what we expect, like with Sodom. But we can have confidence that God is good. He is for us. He hears us. We can anchor our prayers in his character and pray with bold faith that God wants people to know Jesus.

He has compassion on the sick. He's merciful to the poor. He cares for the persecuted church. He wants the gospel to reach the ends of the earth. And we can pray with boldness and access through confidence, access with confidence through our faith in Jesus.

And when we feel this condemnation, when we feel like we fail to pray, we don't have motivation to pray. We have hope because it doesn't depend on us. Jesus Christ is the one who died.

[29:24] More than that, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Even when we fail to measure up, when we fail to pray and intercede, we have this perfect intercessor at the right hand of God.

He is our hope. And so let's pray. Let's pray together. God, thank you that we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in Jesus.

For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. According to the riches of his glory, he may grant us to be strengthened with power through his spirit in our inner being.

That Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith, that we being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend with all the saints. What is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

That we may be filled with all the fullness of God. And now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think. According to the power at work within us, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus.

[30:36] For all generations, forever and ever. Amen.