

Abraham: A Witness for God



SABBATH—OCTOBER 21

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Genesis 18:1–15; Genesis 18:16–33; James 5:16; Genesis 19:1–29.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘I give you a new command: Love each other. You must love each other as I have loved you. All people will know that you are my followers if you love each other’ ” (John 13:34, 35, ICB).

Abraham did three things: he showed his guests hospitality, he showed love for sinners, and he prayed.

FROM THE START, ABRAHAM wanted to work with God to save sinners. We see this Bible truth in Genesis 18. In this chapter, God warns Abraham that Sodom and Gomorrah will be destroyed. Why does God share this information with Abraham? The Bible tells us: “Before the Lord God does anything, he tells his servants the prophets [God’s special messengers]” (Amos 3:7, ICB). In the story about Sodom and Gomorrah, God’s prophet is Abraham.

While Abraham rests during the hot part of day, he sees three travelers. Abraham invites them to be his guests. “Abraham thought his three guests were only tired travelers. Abraham had no idea that among them was Someone he could worship. Abraham’s worship of this Person was not a sin.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pages 138, 139, adapted.

Abraham got involved in God’s work. He prayed for the people in Sodom and Gomorrah. He asked God to save them. If saving people isn’t what God’s work is about, what is? In Genesis 18, Abraham did three things: he showed his guests hospitality, he showed love for sinners, and he prayed. We should do these things when we do God’s work, too.

THE GIFT OF HOSPITALITY (Genesis 18:1–15, ERV)

Read the story in Genesis 18:1–15. How does Abraham show hospitality to his guests?

Abraham sat in the doorway of his tent when the day was very hot. Abraham's behavior is a bit odd. At that time of day in summer, the sun was high in the sky. So, everyone wanted to rest under a shady tree with a fresh breeze. Why, then, was Abraham waiting in the hot sun? Maybe he wanted to be ready to help anyone who passed by.

While Abraham sat in the doorway of his tent, he saw three travelers. Abraham liked to offer hospitality to strangers. So, he ran to them. This part of the story is important: Abraham made the decision to meet the travelers first before they came to him.

Abraham told the strangers, " 'I will bring some water to wash your feet. You can rest under the trees. I will get some food for you, and you can eat as much as you want. Then you can continue your journey.' "

Abraham knew what he needed to do. The Lord wanted him to share with everyone His knowledge about God. The earth was filled with people who worshiped nature and many gods. As we can see from this story, Abraham did God's work by offering hospitality to these three strangers.

Many people learned about God from Abraham. Abraham "had many servants. More than 1,000 people served Abraham. They were all part of Abraham's family. Many of these servants worshiped the Lord. Abraham needed to be firm and wise to manage a family group this big. . . . Abraham's faith touched the lives of many people beyond his family group. Wherever Abraham camped, he built an altar for God next to his tent. When Abraham moved his tent to another place, he left the altar behind. Many Canaanites who traveled the land stopped at the altar to make an offering to God. These Canaanites learned about God from Abraham and how he lived."—Ellen G. White, *Education*, page 187, adapted.

From the start, Abraham understood that God chose him to help Him save sinners. Abraham knew that he wasn't going to the Promised Land for a vacation. He went there to be a blessing to the people around him and to everyone on earth.

Think about Abraham's example of hospitality. How can you show this same hospitality to the people in your life?



While Abraham sat in the doorway of his tent, he saw three travelers.

ABRAHAM'S LOVE FOR EVERYONE (Genesis 18:16–33)

Read Genesis 18:16–33. How did Abraham show his love for all people from every family group or race group?

Genesis 18 shows us that Abraham loved people. Abraham also loved strangers. Abraham's love is an important lesson for each of us. The people from Sodom and Gomorrah were sinners. They didn't follow God or behave the same as Abraham. Abraham's heart was filled with love for them and for everyone else, anyway. Abraham's love for people didn't depend on who they were, what language they spoke, or their religion.

God tells Abraham about His decision to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. "Then the Lord said, 'I have heard many times that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah are very evil. I will go and see if they are as bad as I have heard. Then I will know for sure'" (Genesis 18:20, 21, ERV).

Abraham's heart is empty of all pride when he answers God. Abraham's words are filled with respect for God. " 'May You never do such a thing as to destroy the good with the bad! May the good never be punished like [the same as] the bad! You would never do such a thing! Will not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?' " (Genesis 18:25, NLV).

Abraham hoped his love for the people in Sodom and Gomorrah would save everyone in the cities, and not only the good people. For sure, Abraham knew that the people who lived there were very evil. Who knows what stories he heard about their terrible behavior and their sins? From what we know about the people from Genesis 19, we understand that they were very evil people. (Read in Genesis 19:1–11 about Lot's story and the crowd outside his house.)

Abraham knew God's love. So, he asked God to show mercy to the people in Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham knew that people can change. They can come to God and ask for forgiveness. Abraham knew that as long as someone is alive, there is always hope that God can save this person.

Why is praying for other people so important in our spiritual lives? How can praying for people who are in need help our spiritual lives to grow? How can our prayers for people help us understand more about God's love for sinners?



Abraham's love for people didn't depend on who they were, what language they spoke, or their religion.

PRAYING WITH THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM (Genesis 18:23–32)

Read Genesis 18:23–32 and James 5:16. What do these verses teach us about praying for other people? Why is our praying for people a powerful spiritual experience?

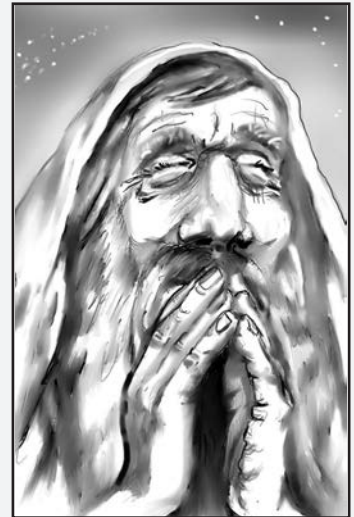
The conversation between God and Abraham is a symbol or a word picture for our prayers for other people. Abraham is a symbol for Jesus. Jesus stands in front of God the Father and asks Him to help us. In the same way, Abraham asks God to save the people in Sodom and Gomorrah. We will have success in our work for God only if we pray for people as Abraham prayed.

Abraham learned to love the people in Sodom and Gomorrah. He also loved the people in the other cities nearby. Because of Abraham's love, his prayer was honest and caring. Abraham already fought against some kings who beat the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah in war. After Abraham won, Bera, the King of Sodom, came to meet Abraham. Bera asked for freedom for his people: "Give me the people. Keep everything else for yourself" (Genesis 14:21, NIV). Bera shows us with these words that he loves his people very much. Abraham loved the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. He prayed for them and their people because his heart was filled with love. "Abraham loved sinners. His love for them caused him to pray for them to be saved."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 140, adapted.

Abraham's heart was empty of all pride. His prayers were without pride, too. Abraham never gave up. He kept trying to save people until the end. First, Abraham asked God to save the city of Sodom as long as 50 holy people lived there. When God agreed to what Abraham asked for, Abraham continued to ask for more.

Our work for God can't succeed without prayer, including prayer for other people. After we meet someone or give a sermon or Bible study, we must pray for them. God will hear our prayers. God will touch the hearts of the people we meet. Our words will not change the hearts of our friends or the people we meet. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. Our job is to pray for each person whose life we touch in the work we do for God.

Read Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25. What do these verses say that Jesus does for us? How can this Bible truth help us better understand why we must pray for people?



Because of Abraham's love, his prayer was honest and caring.

ABRAHAM'S WORK FOR GOD (Genesis 19:1–29)

Read Genesis 19:1–29. What good things happened because of Abraham's hospitality, love, and prayer?

Genesis 19:1–29 gives us an interesting hint about the work that Lot did in the city of Sodom: "Lot was sitting near the city gate" (Genesis 19:1, ICB). In Old Testament times, only leaders, judges, and kings were permitted to sit in the gate of a city (read 2 Samuel 19:8; Jeremiah 38:7; Ruth 4:1). So, this verse shows us that Lot was an important person in the city. At the very least, he was a public leader.

Many things that we saw happen in Genesis 18, in the story about the angels with Abraham, also happen in Genesis 19, with Lot and the visitors. Both Abraham and Lot sat at an entrance or gate (Genesis 18:1; Genesis 19:1). Both Abraham and Lot invited the strangers to come rest (Genesis 18:3; Genesis 19:1). Both Abraham and Lot made food for their visitors (Genesis 18:4–8; Genesis 19:3). Whatever weaknesses and bad habits Lot had, he was friendly and nice to strangers.

"Then the Lord poured fire from the heavens upon Sodom and Gomorrah. He destroyed those cities, and all the valley, and all the people of [in] the cities, and what grew on the ground" (Genesis 19:24, 25, NLV).

We don't know how many people lived in Sodom and Gomorrah at the time that God destroyed those cities. We do know that only four people left Sodom, and only three of them were saved. The same with the Flood in Genesis. We don't know how many people lived before the Flood. But we know that most of them were not saved.

The small number of people from Sodom who were saved is a warning to us in our work for God. Not everyone whose life we touch will be saved. Of course, we want everyone to accept Jesus and be saved. At the same time, we must remember that each person has free choice. Our job is to invite as many people as possible to make the choice for Jesus. God will send His Holy Spirit to help us. But God will never force anyone to accept Him or go against someone's free choice. Free choice means that the people we pray for are saved or lost because of their own choice.

What if we don't see any change in the lives of the people we pray for? How can we learn not to lose hope?



We do know that only four people left Sodom, and only three of them were saved.

SURRENDERING OURSELVES TO GOD’S CONTROL (Genesis 12:1–9)

Read Genesis 12:1–9. What do these verses teach us about surrendering ourselves to God’s control? What if we aren’t sure about what He wants us to do? Or what if the work He gives us is hard?

Abraham teaches us that we must surrender the control of our lives to the Lord. Let’s look at three experiences in Abraham’s life where he surrendered to God’s control.

Work: God gave Abraham (named Abram in this first experience) a hard task: “The LORD said to Abram, ‘Leave your country and your people. Leave your father’s family and go to the country that I will show you’ ” (Genesis 12:1, ERV). When Abraham heard the voice from heaven, did he pay no attention to it? Or did he tell God, “I don’t want to go anywhere. I like where I am living”? No, Abraham obeyed God. Abraham may have thought that “the country that I will show you” was a strange way to talk about a place! But Abraham went anyway. He surrendered himself to God and left his father’s house and his country: “So Abram left as the Lord told him to do” (Genesis 12:4, NLV).

Choice of land: The servants of Lot and Abraham started fighting. Abraham didn’t want fighting. He surrendered himself to God and did what God wanted him to do. God blessed Abraham again. “After Lot left, the Lord said to Abram, ‘Look around you. Look north, south, east, west. All this land that you see I will give to you and your people who live after you. This will be your land forever’ ” (Genesis 13:14, 15, ERV).

Sodom and Gomorrah: After God tells Abraham what will happen to Sodom and Gomorrah, what does Abraham do? Abraham’s heart is filled with love. So, he tries to save the cities. Sad to say, there aren’t 10 holy people in Sodom and Gomorrah. So, God destroys them. Abraham surrenders to God and accepts God’s final decision to destroy these evil cities.

The Lord used Abraham because he surrendered his heart and life to God. We must do the same today.

Task #1: What problems do we have when we preach the Good News in cities? Ask God to help us solve these problems.

Task #2: Do you know someone who is having a hard time? Pray for this person. Ask God to show you how you can help.



“The LORD said to Abram, ‘Leave your country and your people. Leave your father’s family and go to the country that I will show you’ ” (Genesis 12:1, ERV).



Jesus paid the price for our sins. He knows how much each one of us is worth.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “Abraham loved sinners. His love for them caused him to pray for them to be saved. Abraham hated the sins that the people in Sodom did. At the same time, he wanted sinners to be saved. Abraham is our example. He shows us how much we should care about sinners. We must hate sin, but we must love the sinner. People all around us are lost. They have no hope. Their lives are being ruined. What happened to Sodom will happen to them. Every day, someone’s chance for everlasting life comes to an end. God’s saving mercy can no longer touch their hearts. Where are the people who should be warning these lost ones about the danger they are in? Where are the hands that will pull these sinners back from death? Where are those people who have the faith to ask God to save these lost ones?”

“The spirit of Abraham was the spirit of Jesus. The Son of God is our Helper. He goes to God for the sinner. Jesus paid the price for our sins. He knows how much each one of us is worth. Jesus’ heart is clean and holy. He hates sin as no one else can. This same Jesus showed love to us sinners that can come only from the holy heart of God. While Jesus suffered on the cross, He prayed for the people who hated Him and put Him there. Jesus, who accepted the awful weight of all our sins, prayed for the ones who caused His pain: ‘Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing.’ Luke 23:34 [ERV].”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 140, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Can you think of other Bible examples of people who followed God’s plan for their lives? What about John the Baptist? Was John’s work a success?
- 2 Read Genesis 19:30–36. What do these verses tell us about the people who were saved from Sodom?
- 3 What other lessons about working for God can we learn from the example of Abraham?
- 4 Think about this question: Was Abraham’s prayer for Sodom and Gomorrah a success? Or did Abraham fail? Explain your answer.

A LITTLE CHURCH WITH A BIG HEART FOR GOD

Seventh-day Adventist church leaders decided it was time to sell a little church on an island in northern Germany. Only six people worshiped there: all members were older people. The church opened in 1940. In the 1950s, the church had 33 members. The head leader of the Rügen church was named Gunthardt. He told church leaders in Germany, “We don’t want to sell our church.”

After East and West Germany joined as one country in 1990, the little church on Rügen Island lost more members. Some members died. Young ones moved away. Also, the people who lived on the island weren’t very religious. The church’s only visitors were people who came to the island on vacation. Gunthardt and his wife joined with the other four church members. Two of these members included Gunthardt’s parents. Together, they prayed, “Lord, bring us new members.”

Then an Adventist doctor and his family moved to the island. The members kept praying. Then a member who stopped coming to church for a while started to come again, and several new people joined. Soon 16 people started worshiping at the little church on Rügen Island. The church leaders in Germany decided to keep the church open. Soon, the church members needed a new church building. Members prayed and gave 136,000 euros (that’s 136,000 U.S. dollars). They needed 730,000 euros total. The people kept praying for God to help them get the money they needed.

Gunthardt was a builder. He drew a plan for a new church building. Church members all over Germany gave money to help pay for it. Soon after, Gunthardt met a government leader at a meeting and told him about the new church building plan. The leader told Gundthardt to contact a local community leader for help. Before Gundthardt met with this leader, church members prayed. The local leader offered Gundthardt 300,000 euros. The leader said, “I am a Christian. Please use the new church building to help people learn Bible truth.”

Today, 25 members and their children worship every Sabbath at the church on Rügen Island. Gundthardt says, “We have a new church building, and we owe no money. God showed us that He wanted our church to stay open.”

The Rügen church waits for more miracles. Their work for God shows us Church Growth Task #2 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” plan. Church Growth Task #2 is: “We will help the Adventist church grow strong in new ways in large cities. We will share Jesus with people who do not know Him.” Read more: IWillGo2020.org. Gundthardt says, “The people on our island are not religious. We are trying to connect with them.”

INSIDE
Story
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



Together, they prayed,
“Lord, bring us new
members.”

