

PRAY LIKE THIS

Part 3 of Foundations 260 - OT. Genesis 18:16-33.

Peter Foxwell. The Cornerstone Church. January 25, 2026.

Dismiss the Middle School

LENT

Lent is a season in the church year where we take time to reflect on our lives in relation to God. There are many ways to participate in the 40 days of Lent leading up to Easter, but this year, I'm inviting you to do two things:

1. **Come to our Ash Wednesday worship service** on February 18. This is the first day of Lent, and it would be helpful to take a brief time to focus on Christ and his Cross as the only remedy for our sins.
2. **The second Lenten activity is to read this book:** *Create In Me A Clean Heart* by David Roseberry. It contains 39 daily reflections on Psalm 51, one for each day leading up to Easter. Psalm 51 is a moving example of repenting of sin and seeking God's restoration.

So... my thinking is this: we're all busy and stressed, and these two spiritual practices will help us slow down and enjoy God's overflowing grace and love without overwhelming us.

A RARE AND PRECIOUS INSIGHT

In last week's Foundations 260 readings, we were given a rare and precious insight into how God hears and answers prayer.

99% of reality is hidden from the naked eye. We do not see God and the spirit world.

But in Genesis 18, the curtain is drawn back to reveal what happens when we pray.

Verses 16-33 contain three insights or principles that can refuel our passion for praying and connecting more deeply with the Lord. And who doesn't need that?

We'll get to those in a moment, but first we need some background.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Genesis 18 is part of the Abraham story. God made a covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12, 15, 17), making him a key figure in salvation history.

Abraham's nephew, Lot, settled in the city of Sodom, located in a fertile valley close to the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. It was a prosperous and sophisticated city protected by a thick, high wall. The people were Canaanites, and they were bad to the bone.

Genesis 13:13 (CSB) Now the men of Sodom were evil, sinning immensely against the LORD.

Ezekiel 16:49-50 (CSB) Now this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters had pride, plenty of food, and comfortable security, but didn't support the poor and needy. 50 They were haughty and did detestable acts before me ...

Jude 1:7 (CSB) Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns committed sexual immorality and perversions ...

And that brings us to Abraham's encounter with three "strange" visitors.

Genesis 18:1-2 (CSB) The LORD appeared to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance of his tent during the heat of the day. 2 He looked up, and he saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to meet them, bowed to the ground ...

That's a remarkable encounter. It was God and two angels (Genesis 19:1). So, we know something unusual is about to happen. Let's see what that was.

Let's go to Genesis 18:16-33, where I found three principles for prayer.

THREE PRINCIPLES OF PRAYER

PRAYER PRINCIPLE ONE: CULTIVATE CONVERSATION BEFORE INTERCESSION - verses 16-21.

Genesis 18:16-21 (CSB) The men (God and angels) got up from there and looked out over Sodom, and Abraham was walking with them to see them off. 17 Then the LORD said, "Should I hide what I am about to do from Abraham? 18 Abraham is to become a great and powerful nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him. 19 For I have chosen him so that he will command his children and his house after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just. This is how the LORD will fulfill to Abraham what he promised him." 20 Then the LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is immense, and their sin is extremely serious. 21 I will go down to see if what they have done justifies the cry that has come up to me. If not, I will find out."

God discussed with Abraham a concern over Sodom's wickedness. In that conversation, Abraham became a bridge between God and people. He stood in the gap like a priest or prophet.

The Lord's surprising monologue reveals a relationship between God and Abraham. God let Abraham in on his thoughts and concerns. He trusted Abraham and brought him into the situation.

And that reminds us that prayer does not begin with requests. God is not an ATM or genie. He is a personal God who values his relationship with us. The Lord's Prayer begins with **"Our Father"** to remind us that we are family, and we can draw near to God as Father first and foremost.

Slow down, stay for a while, take a breath, listen, chat, and be present to God BEFORE asking for anything. An encounter with God is the best prayer.

PRAYER PRINCIPLE TWO: BASE INTERCESSION ON GOD'S CHARACTER AND PROMISES - verses 22-25.

Genesis 18:22-25 (CSB) The men turned from there and went toward Sodom while Abraham remained standing before the LORD. 23 Abraham stepped forward and said, "Will you really sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away instead of sparing the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people who are in it? 25 You could not possibly do such a thing: to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. You could not possibly do that! Won't the Judge of the whole earth do what is just?"

Abraham stood in the gap to plead for mercy on the people of Sodom. His request manifested God's heart for all people.

Abraham's prayer was based on God's character. He was sure of the Lord's mercy and justice, believing he would do the right thing. God is not capricious; he doesn't do evil things. The Lord proclaimed his character to Moses:

Exodus 34:6-7 (CSB) The LORD — the LORD is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth, 7 maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But he will not leave the guilty unpunished, bringing the consequences of the fathers' iniquity on the children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation.

The best prayers, the ones the Lord answers in the affirmative, are based on his character, which is revealed in his promises. Don't remake God to get what you want; instead, remake your prayers in line with what God wants. For example:

- He is not the genie god who keeps us from hardship, but the true God who goes with us through the darkest valley.

- He is not the genie god who meets all our wants, but the true God who gives us our daily bread and meets our needs.
- He is not the genie god who fixes all our problems on demand, but the true God whose grace is sufficient and whose strength is made perfect in our weakness.
- He is not the genie god who spares us from suffering, but the true God, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort who comforts us in all our affliction.
- He is not the genie god who judges or destroys the people we don't like, but the true God who is not willing for anyone to perish, but wants everyone to repent and find salvation in Christ.

Pray according to God's will, which is based on his character and promises.

PRAYER PRINCIPLE THREE: INTERCEDE BOLDLY AND HUMBLY - verses 26-33.

Genesis 18:26-33 (CSB) The LORD said, “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

27 Then Abraham answered, “Since I have ventured to speak to my lord — even though I am dust and ashes — 28 suppose the fifty righteous lack five. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five? ”

He replied, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.”

29 Then he spoke to him again, “Suppose forty are found there? ”

He answered, “I will not do it on account of forty.”

30 Then he said, “Let my lord not be angry, and I will speak further. Suppose thirty are found there? ”

He answered, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”

31 Then he said, “Since I have ventured to speak to my lord, suppose twenty are found there? ”

He replied, “I will not destroy it on account of twenty.”

32 Then he said, “Let my lord not be angry, and I will speak one more time. Suppose ten are found there? ”

He answered, “I will not destroy it on account of ten.” 33 When the LORD had finished speaking with Abraham, he departed, and Abraham returned to his place.

Abraham could have been filled with pride because the Lord came to visit him. Instead, his encounter with God humbled him. He prayed, ***“Since I have ventured to speak to my lord – even though I am dust and ashes ... (v. 27).***

Abraham felt privileged to talk to God. It felt risky (***ventured***) or above his station. He didn’t take access for granted. He didn’t name, claim, or demand.

However, Abraham also prayed boldly, one request after another: 50, 45, 40, 30, 20, 10. And God was quick to agree because he is slow to anger and rich in mercy. In the end, he rescued Lot and his family, but no one else (19:12-17).

I have some questions about this passage. For example: Why would God take our prayers into account? If God is sovereign, why pray? The best Bible scholars have pondered that paradox for thousands of years.

It appears that the Lord invites us to pray because, in some way I cannot fathom, he has tied his plan to our prayers. He’s still God, he’s still sovereign, but in his sovereignty, he includes our prayers in how he works things out.

You could say that God has made prayer essential and meaningful. Our prayers matter. In a sense, they change things.

More than that, our bold, audacious, impossible prayers are welcome. God isn’t rattled by them. We can’t manipulate him, but he answers according to his will: Sometimes yes, sometimes no, sometimes not yet.

The better we know God and his Word and the more experience we have with his ways of working in us and in the world, the bolder we will be in prayer. Once you’ve witnessed God do what only God can do, it stokes your confidence to pray more boldly.

What would you pray right now if you believed your prayers mattered?

LET US PRAY!

I love the part of the service where I say, “Let us pray!” The God of the universe actually invites ordinary people like us into his plans through real, meaningful intercession.

Remember these principles of prayer:

- **Draw near before you ask.** You’ll enjoy prayer more when it’s a conversation with your Heavenly Father, the one who knows and loves you better than anyone else. Slow down, stay a while.
- **Pray from who God is.** Base your prayers on God’s will and ways, his character, and his promises. Pray to the Lord who is more willing to hear us than we are to ask. Plead on the basis of his justice, mercy, patience, grace, love, and holiness.
- **Be bold and humble.** The Lord is looking for men and women who know they are dust, yet dare to stand before him with bold requests for their families, their church, their city, and the nations. Jesus taught us to pray, ***“Lord, your will be done ...”***

Call to Action

Prayer costs us nothing but time. And it doesn’t depend on our wealth, power, social status, or skill. It depends on one thing only: We have access to God through Jesus Christ, who shed his blood to open the way to God’s throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16).

Will you stand in the gap, or will you stand on the sidelines?

Let us pray!

Young Adults/Families meet up. Get your food first.

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Review

- Review Peter's January 25th teaching and study guide.
- What were the main insights of Peter's teaching?
- What questions do you have about the passage or Peter's teaching?
- What were the main applications or takeaways for your life?

Discuss

1. What are some practical ways you can “slow down, stay a while” with God this week instead of rushing straight to your requests
2. When have you felt most aware that God was genuinely listening to you?
3. Think of a situation you are praying about. How could you reshape that request so it is more clearly anchored in God's character and in the Bible's promises? What are some ways that you have used to learn more about God's character and plans so you can pray according to his will?
4. What bold, specific, “impossible” prayers are you praying? Why do you feel right about doing so? What would you say to someone struggling to be bold in prayer?

Prayer Focus

- Pray the 247 Prayer: “Lord, please add daily to the Cornerstone those who are being saved.”
- Ask God to pour out a “spirit of intercession” on the Cornerstone family that results in a church-wide prayer movement.