

## GENESIS 18:16-25, 32-33      RIGHTEOUS ALTRUISM

<sup>16</sup> When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. <sup>17</sup> Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? <sup>18</sup> Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. <sup>19</sup> For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

<sup>20</sup> Then the LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous <sup>21</sup> that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know."

<sup>22</sup> The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. <sup>23</sup> Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? <sup>24</sup> What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? <sup>25</sup> Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

<sup>32</sup> Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?" He answered, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it."

<sup>33</sup> When the LORD had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.

I have heard it said that God knows all things and his will is sovereign so he doesn't need me to pray. As with all partial understandings, there is a nugget of truth in that statement. God doesn't *need* our prayers. But then again, he doesn't *need* us or the rest of creation either. However, we would be absolutely wrong to conclude that God does not *desire* our prayers.

God is on his way to Sodom to bring his righteous judgment down upon it for the decadence of its inhabitants. On his way he passes Abraham, receives his hospitality and blesses Abraham by confirming his promise. As Abraham walks with God (think, Garden of Eden), God reveals his plan for Sodom. From his internal dialogue we can glean that in close relationships we do not keep secrets about plans that affect the other partner. God is also sharing with Abraham and us, his expectations for his people and the consequences of our disobedience.

At another level, God is testing Abraham's potential for righteous altruism. The passage reveals how deep Abraham's concern for his neighbors is, as well as his concern for the reputation of his God. My conclusion is that intercessory prayer is the link we forge between the two orders of the Great Commandment; to love God and to love our neighbor. Intercessory prayer is the most accessible way in which we are able to acknowledge God in our daily circumstances and relationships.

**Thank you, Lord, for desiring to be in relationship with us through our prayers. Help us, like Abraham, to grow in a God-like love for our neighbors, and at the same time to develop a greater practical understanding of you. Amen.**