

Standing in the Home Depot aisle on Friday a father and son came up next to me. The father was silent as he looked for what he wanted. The boy, probably about six or seven, was hanging right near dad's legs. Then I heard what wasn't understandable, but the tone in which the boy said it was. That whiny, high pitched, begging kind of tone. He wanted something and he wasn't getting it. I don't know if he wanted something from Home Depot or something from somewhere else. It wasn't yet full meltdown or causing a scene, just the initial stage. Begging for what he wanted, mumbling as he walked past me that it wasn't fair, and looking up at his dad with longing eyes. I left before it escalated.

That boy was probably just doing as he had done many times previously with his dad. If he wanted breakfast at a local restaurant, that boy knew from experience sometimes dad did take him out to eat. If it was a toy at the next store, that boy had the history of getting toys before from dad. He may not have been humble but he sure was bold because whatever he wanted he went to dad because he knew dad could and had given him things. He let who his dad was guide his requests.

One of God's own people was standing before him in the first lesson making requests. His requests were like our requests, our prayers. We're going to God. But why would God listen to us? How is God allowing us to stand before him? That's what this morning we'll find out from God's Word...

**Let who God is guide your prayers**  
**Be humble because God is just**  
**Be bold because God is gracious**

Abraham had just entertained God and two angels in his tent. It was a special visit since God masked himself but made huge promises. Abraham and his wife, Sarah, were childless. Still God promised them many descendants. This visit was to announce their first son was a year away. All the amazing promises God made were yet to come true. But every one of them showed God's kindness to Abraham, and were something he could hold on to while he waited.

Forty miles away in Sodom and Gomorrah things were quite different. You may recognize Sodom and Gomorrah even if you haven't read the Bible much. That town was like Sodom and Gomorrah. It's a way of talking about moral depravity. God wasn't welcome there, at least not by the majority. The sinfulness of Sodom was so great, so deplorable, cries went up to God. Wickedness of all kinds was on display, including homosexuality as chief among them. **"Then the LORD said, the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me."** God was perfect. He was without fault, had nothing to do with sin, and never was associated with wickedness. God was just and righteous. Open sinfulness and wickedness of the kind happening in Sodom basically smacked God in the face. And he didn't have to go look to know. He knew exactly what was happening, he knew their sins. He knew their wickedness. God's justice demanded he take action.

But before God left Abraham's tent he lingered. **"Abraham remained standing before the LORD."** The Lord was almost inviting, urging, seeking Abraham's prayers regarding Sodom. While there were many unrighteous, unbelieving, outwardly sinful people in Sodom, Abraham knew one family that wasn't. His nephew Lot lived in Sodom. Destruction of the city would mean destruction of Lot and his family too. Destruction would mean some righteous, morally upright, believing people would also die.

So Abraham prayed to the Lord. Guided in his prayer knowing God was just, Abraham came in humility. Abraham was mere dust and ashes in comparison with God. He had no basis for praying as a human before the almighty, powerful God. He didn't deserve to even talk with God, much less pray and ask this God for something or try to get him to change his mind. So with the focus off himself and on God, he reminded God of who God is. **"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?"** In humility, because he knew God, Abraham was confident God would do the right thing, the just thing. **"Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"** Abraham knew God was just, always right, never having anything to do with wickedness. God would be perfectly consistent in his justice.

Unfortunately I know far too often I approach God focused on myself. Rather than be guided by who God is in my prayers, I'm guided by what I want in my prayers. I try to make it sound humble. But sometimes my prayers sound very much like I'm telling God exactly how I want my life to go. Does this sound like maybe your prayers too sometimes? God, I know you'll want to see me successful. I've tried really hard to do that and I know that you'll help me. Lord I really need this job or I really have to sell this house. I've worked at it but all my effort seems wasted. There are times we come sounding extremely confident in ourselves, sounding like God should be confident in us too. We're good people. We're honest hardworking people. We've done the right things and tried to do the right things. Why wouldn't God give us what we pray for exactly?

To be that confident and lacking that much humility almost requires downplaying sin. That's what they did in Sodom. Their sins weren't that bad. They were generally good people. While Abraham prayed for them to be spared they went on with sinful life as usual. At times are we down in Sodom whistling away while sin fills up around us instead of praying before God? Do we try hard to convince ourselves not all sins are bad? That some are actually necessary. Greed makes capitalism go. Lies make home life easier. Everybody cheats in school. If our sin isn't that bad then God will probably listen to our prayers. But God is perfectly just. All sin is wicked. And all sinful wickedness is worthy of punishment. The Judge of all the earth will do what's just. Our sins are worthy of the same as Sodom, destructive fire and eternal death.

Abraham just kept pushing the number lower. **"Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty?"** He may have started at fifty, but before long he was scrapping the bottom at ten. Did Abraham know it would be a stretch to find that many righteous in Sodom? Was Abraham just confident in who God had showed himself to be? Whatever it was, every request to a lower number, every prayer Abraham spoke, he was hearing God's grace. God had been gracious to Abraham in the past. God loved his people and Abraham knew that God had made him one of his people. He was reminded of it as God promised him a son and a Savior. So Abraham could be bold in prayer now knowing God would listen.

God knew exactly how many righteous people were in Sodom. He knew what he was going to do, but he graciously lowered himself to a human level. He graciously heard Abraham's prayers. And in an even further stunning display of grace, God said yes to each. Yes he would spare the city for fifty. Yes he would for forty and twenty. **"For the sake of the ten, I will not destroy it."** God listened to Abraham and showed his grace. Who God was, that was what was guiding Abraham's prayers. God revealed he was gracious, so Abraham could be bold in prayer.

Do you know God as a God of grace? Of course you do. You're in this place because of grace. The fact that God loves you even though he knows you, that's God's grace. Earlier you confessed your sins in the first part of the service. You confessed you were a sinner and that you deserved punishment. God heard that confession and God responded that he loved you anyway. He loved you so much that Christ Jesus came to be your Savior before you sinned even once. Jesus took all your sins. He took your wickedness. He took your lack of humility and your fear of pushing God too far and he died for it all. Jesus gave his life in grace for you. Forgiveness is yours. It's walking in here knowing that God is a God of grace with undeserved love for you. Feeling the weight and burden of sin and guilt lifted away. Knowing Jesus loves you and invites you close to your Father in heaven.

Knowing he's gracious let your prayers be bold. You have promises, just like Abraham. Promises and reminders of God's grace. The memory of answered prayers when you didn't think there was a chance God was listening. A heart softened by the gospel, prepared for grace. A promise from God that nothing is too big and nothing is too small to pray to him about. Daily bread isn't too small. Forgiveness of sins isn't too big. Abraham wanted a whole city spared for the sake of ten people. Do you want a loved one spared from pain? Do you want a job or friends? Those prayers aren't too small. Are you thinking about this country that seems lost? That's not too big to pray for. Spare this country. Keep me from disease. Walk with me, strengthen me.

Because you know God is gracious pray persistently. Keep coming even when God says yes. When God gives daily bread today, pray for the same tomorrow. When God grants healing for a minor cold pray when you face surgery. If God says yes to leaving you in this world a little longer then pray for even more time to grow in faith and share that faith with others. And when God hasn't responded yet, keep coming. Keep praying to the throne of God. He's gracious. He promises to hear and answer them all.

I don't know if that little boy wore his father down. Abraham wasn't trying to wear God down. He was praying guided by who God was. Don't come thinking you have to wear God down. Don't enter prayer as if it's a negotiation. God is just and therefore we only stand before him in prayer with humility. God is gracious so we can stand before him and pray for big and small things alike confident he hears and answers because of our Savior. Let who God is guide your prayers.