



## Abraham: An All-In Life

### Serving God

Tim Badal | November 3, 2019

Let's turn in our Bibles to Genesis 18. We're continuing our study of the life of Abraham, which we've come to realize is an all-in life. Wherever God told him to go, he went.

Whatever God told him to do, he did. He didn't always do it perfectly, but by the grace of God he accomplished the plans God had for him. God has called us to this same kind of life.

But let's be honest. When we in the 21<sup>st</sup> century look at any Bible character and their experience with God, we should never make a one-to-one correlation between men like Abraham and ourselves. Abraham lived in his unique culture and time, but we can't go there. We will never be part of that season of history. As we see Abraham experience God in his personal way, we as students of the Bible need to glean the truths that transcend culture and personal experiences we read about and apply these to our lives. We can see what an all-in life looks like through the model Abraham gave us.

We've seen some of these truths already. An all-in life means we're to follow God and prioritize Him. We are to trust God even when it doesn't make sense. Today we'll learn what it means to serve God, not only in our relationship with Him but also in our relationships with one another.

When we speak of serving God, we usually think about it in utilitarian terms. We observe a need in our church. Maybe there's an announcement that says, "We need people to do this or that." We fill those roles because we feel guilty or we care about the need. For some of us, that's what serving God means. But I want you to see this morning that Abraham modeled a different kind of serving. Serving God doesn't just mean filling a spot when ministry takes place. Rather, as we'll see, serving God is to do the very thing God has called all His followers to do.

One of the great tragedies of the Christian life is that we fail to serve God in faith-stretching ways. We see this in Luke 10:27 when Jesus said the chief purpose of His followers is to *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind."* Many of us understand this element of serving God. We love Him and seek to honor Him by praising Him, reading His Word and growing in our relationship with Him. But we can forget the second part of that verse: *"[Love] your neighbor as yourself."*

Serving God has a vertical component, but also a horizontal one that impacts the lives closest to us and the world around us, but it has to begin with the vertical relationship. As followers of Jesus, we must experience God personally. This can't be a half-filled experience but an overflowing one. We need to have such an incredible walk with God that it literally propels us to go and share our experience with others. In other words, as God fills your cup to overflowing, serving means filling cups around you with the overflow of God's grace, love and mercy.

God explained this to Abraham when He said, "I'm going to bless you. I'm going to pour into you until your cup overflows. Through this blessing, you need to become a blessing to others." Serving means becoming a funnel through which God's blessings can flow to other people.

As I was trying to think of a way to illustrate this, I found a video on Twitter that had gone viral. When I saw it, I thought, "That is a picture of serving God." Before I show it to you, I'll tell you that it involves a kid who is trick-or-treating dressed as Dracula. Maybe some of you have seen this already, but let's look at it together.



[To view video, go to <https://tinyurl.com/y29hyynw>]

What do we see there? We see a kid coming up on something empty. A selfish individual might have thought, "How dare these people not have candy for me when I get here?" This kid did the opposite. He saw the empty bowl differently, thinking, "All the other houses have been so generous to me, so I can take from what they've given me and put it where there's nothing."

Being a Christian and serving God means taking the benefits and blessings we've received from God to a world of empty people. We need to put what God has given us into the lives of others. This is happening all over. I'm taking what I've learned from my week of study in God's Word and am now able to give you what I'm overflowing with.

This also happens when people greet you. When someone says, "Good morning—it's great to have you here," hopefully some of their joy is filling your cup. It happens when kids leave this room thinking, "Thank you that we don't have to listen to Pastor Tim." They go into their classrooms where there are teachers who are excited about the love God has shown them. They're glad to tell the kids how God has worked in their lives.

We see this in 170 of our students who are at fall retreat. Let's pray for them as they travel back from Michigan, but then let's pray three times as much for those leaders who have endured 72 hours of all kinds of bad smells and awkward talks. These leaders took their weekend to serve our kids. Who in their right mind would give up their weekend to be with teenagers? People who love the Lord and are overflowing with His grace and joy. After a week of hard work, they're willing to pour what they've received from God into the lives of our kids. We should have awards for these people! That's what serving God looks like.

You've seen it with the worship team. You saw it when Elder John served communion. We don't stand up here because we have to. We don't do it begrudgingly. We're doing it because we have experienced God. Serving God means taking what God has given us and giving it to the world. That's what we'll be seeing in Genesis 18 this morning, starting in Genesis 18:16

There is a lot happening in this passage. Abraham and Sarah were living in a tent in Canaan, then one random day three mysterious visitors came to their tent. Abraham quickly deduced that they were heavenly creatures. He even addressed one as "my Lord." Scholars tell us it was a preincarnate visit from Jesus Christ—a "theophany." We later learn that the other visitors were angels. Abraham and Sarah quickly fixed them some food. Just imagine if Jesus and two angels showed up at your door. You would also try to give them the best of everything you have.

After dinner, Abraham talked with his three guests. The Lord said to him, "When we return next year, your promised son will be here." Sarah wasn't with them at the time, but she heard what was said and she laughed. "You've got to be kidding me. I'm old, and have you seen my husband? He's even older than I am. It can't happen." We'll talk about that part of the story in another sermon.

As the visitors prepared to leave, we learn that they were going on to Sodom, which was where Lot had chosen to live. Remember that Sodom was known for its debauchery and sin. We're told that heaven had heard the outcry against Sodom and its neighbor Gomorrah. This reminds us that when we suffer here on earth, heaven is aware of it. In this case, God sent angels to check out the situation and decided that if it was as bad as the reports made it, He would destroy the cities. For the first time in all of Scripture, one human being was able to intercede with God on behalf of other human beings.

Let's look at three truths we need to remember if we're going to serve God.

## Serving God means seeing God at work.

We can't serve God if we don't know what He's doing. Henry Blackaby was a pastor who wrote *Experiencing God*, a book that revolutionized the church world. One of his main points was that God is on the move and it's our job to find out where He's working, then meet Him there. Don't try to start some new work; God is already at work. He's the One Who initiates what needs to be done.

## Walking with Him

Seeing God at work requires walking with Him. Look at Genesis 18:16-21:

<sup>16</sup> Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. <sup>17</sup> The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do,<sup>18</sup> seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?<sup>19</sup> 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 him."<sup>20</sup> Then the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave,<sup>21</sup> 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."

God just unveiled His plans and purposes to Abraham. How did Abraham cooperate with that? He did something we also can do—he walked with God. Note where it says that as the men were heading to Sodom, Abraham went with them.

Have you ever had a guest you didn't want to leave? This was true for Abraham. He had experienced a great time with these visitors and didn't want the time to end. So he told Sarah, "I'm going to walk with them for a while, so I can see them on their way." You might say he wanted to get all the meat off the bone. This decision placed Abraham in a position to hear from God. If he had decided he had heard enough from these visitors, he would never have heard what God was going to do. But because he wanted more time with them, he gained this knowledge.

You and I don't have the same opportunity to actually walk with God in person. We can't send the message to God, "Hey, I'm here at 410 Prairievie Lane and I'd like to walk the neighborhood with You." But we're told in the Bible that we can still actually walk with Him, referring to our lifestyle. In the New Testament, this is called walking according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh. It means we're so in tune with what God is doing in our own lives that it's as if we're literally walking together. He leads and wherever He goes, I go with Him. Whatever He does, I do as well. My thoughts, decisions, plans and priorities are all in tune with the God I'm walking with.

Walking with God meant Abraham had to say no to some other things on his schedule—maybe even important things—so he could be with God without distraction. And so it is with every one of us. We can never know the plans and purposes of God unless we choose to walk with Him.

## Talking with Him

Beyond walking with God, this also involves talking with Him. As God and Abraham were heading toward Sodom, God gave Abraham a sneak peek at what He intended to do. Abraham never actually asked the men where they were going or what they were doing. God initiated the conversation. He is the One Who reveals Himself. Abraham simply positioned himself so that if God wanted to speak, he would be ready to hear.

The men asked, "Should we tell Abraham these things?" God decided He would. In Genesis 18:20-21, He 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."* God had decided He was going to judge these cities.

Abraham was disturbed by what he heard. Let's pick up in Genesis 18:22:

<sup>22</sup>So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. <sup>23</sup>Then Abraham drew near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? <sup>24</sup>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? <sup>25</sup>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! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" <sup>26</sup>And the LORD said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake."

<sup>27</sup>Abraham answered and said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. <sup>28</sup>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." <sup>29</sup>Again he spoke to him and said, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." <sup>30</sup>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." <sup>31</sup>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." <sup>32</sup>Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it." <sup>33</sup>And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.

We talked about our conversations with God last week. Remember, we're to speak honestly, which we see in Abraham's conversation here. We're also to speak humbly and we see that here as well. Over and over again Abraham said, "Don't be mad at me, God. I am but ashes and dust. Who am I to speak to You? I've come to see You as a Friend to whom I can speak as a man speaks to a man. I believe You're a good and righteous Judge, I'm not understanding what You're about to do." He was under the impression that there might be righteous people in Sodom, so surely God would not want to destroy them because of His judgment against the unrighteous. So he began to bargain with God, starting with 50 people.

Scholars believe that Abraham knew other people, others in Lot's household, who also had moved to Sodom with him. The large number of Lot's servants was part of the reason he had to separate from Abraham in the first place. Abraham was probably thinking that some of these would also have been righteous, as they had seen God's blessing on Abraham. But Abraham continued

to bargain, going to 45, 30, 20 and then ten. He probably began to realize that Sodom was even more wicked than he had thought. Abraham talked openly with God about his concerns.

How often do you talk with Him about the condition of the people around you? How often do you intercede on their behalf? How often do you wrestle with God about your neighbors, or that person in the cubicle next to you, or that kid beside your desk in class? How concerned are you about their eternal destiny? "God, show them mercy and grace. God, be patient and give them the opportunity to experience the righteousness that only comes from You."

This kind of conversation begins with us walking and talking with God. Even though the text doesn't use the word, what we're seeing here is prayer—man talking to God. That's the quintessential definition of prayer: us communicating with the God of the universe. See how confident, honest and humble Abraham is as he speaks with God. We also notice his persistence. God responded to his requests, saying, "If righteous people are found in Sodom, I will not destroy them." Abraham took those righteous people to God in prayer. How persistent are we with our prayers for others?

Abraham could have stopped with this, gone back home and told Sarah how he talked with the Lord. He could also have told her, "The Lord is going to destroy Sodom, so no more going to the Sodom market. Stay away from Sodom. We're not going to any of the Sodom football games or visit our friends there. Stay away." He didn't say to Lot, "We're not doing Thanksgiving with you in Sodom. God is going to destroy the city, so save yourself."

## **Serving God means showing God to others.**

Serving God is more than seeing God at work; it's also showing God to others. We've read about the awesome experience Abraham had with God, but it didn't stay with him, nor did God intend it to. In Genesis 18:17-19, God 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 him.*"

### **This happens to those closest to us.**

God shared with Abraham first of all so that Abraham might prepare those closest to him. We are to show God and what He's doing to those who are closest to us—our family, or as the Bible puts it, our household. Abraham was to communicate what he had experienced to his family. Why? What God was going to do to the unrighteous would never happen to Abraham's family because they had been raised with righteousness and justice.

Listen, those of you who are parents and grandparents, one of the biggest reasons you need to be vigilant in your walk with God is so you can show Him to your children and other family members. That way they'll be less likely to encounter the judgment that Sodom and Gomorrah did, but will thrive under His righteousness and justice. So the question for us this morning is how full is our relationship with the God of the universe? Is it enough to impact our families? Would our children speak of us as having an awesome relationship with God? How would they know that? It would be all they talk about when they're with you.

Let me give you a point of reference. Yesterday Amanda and I stopped at my parents' house. It was just a quick visit, not for a meal or anything. My dad said, "Tim, Amanda, sit down." "Dad, we've got to go. We don't have any kids with us—leave us alone." "No. You sit. I've got to tell you what the Lord has been sharing with me. I'm so excited. God calls us to be people of prayer. He calls us to be people of obedience." "Dad, it's not even Sunday and you're preaching?" Now, Dad is 70 and by that time, a person's walk with God could be stale and commonplace. But my dad acted like it was Christmas morning and he was nine years old. He said, "I can't hold this in, so I'm going to pour it into those who mean the most to me."

Listen, our relationship with God should have a direct correlation to our relationship with our children. Yes, our children will experience great things with their leaders this week, but never let the youth group leaders be the only spiritual giants in your kids' lives. You and I as parents are the number one disciplers. Like Abraham, we are called to pour into the lives of those in our household.

### **This happens to the community around us.**

This goes beyond our families to the communities around us. From all we know, Abraham did very little in and around Sodom and Gomorrah. He kept a healthy distance from their activities and vices. Nevertheless, he had a heart for them. He didn't want to see God destroy those people. He thought there were enough righteous people for God to spare the cities altogether. So he appealed

to God: "Surely you don't need to destroy Sodom. There are people there who love and honor You. Let me find them for you." At the heart of this was Abraham's love for this community such that he was willing to speak on its behalf to God. Jeremiah spoke of this to a group of exiles in Babylon. He told the Israelites of his day, "Seek the welfare of the city."

We as a church should be the biggest proponents before God on behalf of the community of Sugar Grove. We should want to see God do big things in our community. The people in our community should realize that if our church were ever to go out of existence, they would be upset. "What are we going to do, now that Village Bible Church is no longer here? They served and honored us. They prayed to God for our good. We are a better community because they were in our midst."

This is also true on an individual basis wherever you live. Your neighbors should be some of the most prayed-for people anywhere. Why? Because according to God's sovereignty He put you among them. They should be the most loved people, well integrated into your life.

You might be thinking, "Wait a minute. They're sinners. They drink beer. They watch bad movies." Listen, Sodom was a bad place, but it did not keep Abraham from loving them enough to bring them before God. He went to bat for them because he loved his community.

## **Serving God means standing in the gap for others.**

Serving God means showing God to others, starting in our homes, then in our communities. But it goes even farther. It means standing in the gap for them. Abraham offered to go with God to find the righteous people. Abraham understood something that's true for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Your approach to your community—your workplace, your school, your neighborhood—will fall under one of four categories.

1. You buy into the idea of fortification. As a Christian, you build walls around yourself so non-believers cannot dirty you. Some of you are building walls to protect yourself.
2. You buy into the idea of accommodation. Some of us think, "No, we've got to be in the world." Lot bought into accommodation. He married a woman in Sodom and became a leader in the city. He was altogether accommodating the culture and made it his.
3. You buy into the idea of domination. This approach is alive and well in our nation today. "We'll take this community and this country back for ourselves. We'll make it a Christian nation. We'll get back to the good old days. Whether they like it or not, the city of Sugar Grove is going to play by Village's rules, not their own."

None of these three approaches work. None of them are prescribed in Scripture. Instead, the Bible speaks of being "salt and light" which represents the fourth option.

4. You buy into the idea of permeation. We are to start small, but by prayer and engagement, and by the grace and mercy of God, our influence can have an increasing impact in this community. If we are the light in a world of darkness or the salt in a world that needs that kind of preservation, change can happen (Matthew 5:13-16).

### **This means caring for all people.**

How did Abraham live a life of permeation? How do we do it? First, it involves caring for all people. Do you know what kind of people lived in Sodom? They were dirty, filthy people. But Abraham still cared—and we need to care. We need to stop labeling people and to start caring for them.

Is there a place where we don't act as they do? Yes. Is there a place where we speak truth against error? Yes. But never let that trump our love and care for them as human beings. They are people who are lost and without hope, just as we once were. We have to care.

As you leave today, your number one prayer should be, "God, give me the heart for my neighbor, the heart for my community, the heart for my workplace, the heart for my school that You have for them. Show me where You're at work in these places and let me meet You there."

### **This means being convinced that judgment is coming.**

Second, standing in the gap for others means being convinced that judgment is coming. Why was Abraham saying, "No, God, You can't do this"? Because he knew that when God says judgment is coming, it's coming. Likewise, we know this to be true. We know

Jesus will come back and bring judgment to the world. Every name that's not found written in the Lamb's Book of Life will be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 21:22-27). That could be our neighbor or coworker or friend. That may be your spouse or child. They are going to spend eternity in hell, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 22:1-14), apart from any good or grace of God. That will be their eternity. It's in this Book and we believe this Book, yet we go about life—and I do as well—as if we have all the time in the world. People are lost and judgment is coming. Do we care enough about them to share the good news of Jesus Christ with them?

### This means believing that we can accomplish great change.

Finally, do we believe we can accomplish great change? In Genesis 19 we will see that God destroyed Sodom. Abraham failed to get his request. From an earthly standpoint, we might think, "Well, I'm failing too. I'm trying to honor God and make a change, but the world around me is going bad. One of these days God is going to destroy this world." But in Genesis 19:29, we find something that can give us hope as we serve God: "*So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived.*"

Did Abraham find 50? No. Forty-five? No. Forty? No. Thirty? No. Twenty? No. Ten? No. But we're told in the book of Jude and in 2 Peter that Lot was a righteous man. So before He destroyed the city, God rescued Lot and his family, and three of them were saved.

Could it be that God will use you, as you serve Him, to rescue even one from the impending destruction? Surely it's worth our time and effort to save a soul from the flames of hell. Abraham was all-in in serving God and do you know what it did? It blessed others. Abraham was starting to understand that as God blessed him, it was his great opportunity to be a blessing to others.

God has blessed us in immeasurable ways. Will we take that blessing and keep it for ourselves, or will we be generous and give our time, talents and treasure to others so they may experience the goodness and grace we've experienced?

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