

Helping
OTHERS

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Introduction

People with little or no knowledge of the Bible know the question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Cain asked the question when God wanted him to confess that he had murdered his brother (Genesis 4:9, 10). In far less serious situations, people still ask a similar question, “Am I responsible for what happens to so-and-so?” The answer to Cain’s question—as well as the more modern question—is yes. We are each responsible for other people. “No man is an island,” wrote the poet John Donne.

Part of the process of spiritual maturity is learning to recognize one’s role in the lives of other people. “One another” is a Biblical term that acknowledges that we are not alone; we are part of a family: the human family, a particular biological or filial family, and—for believers—the family of God.

God, Who exists in a trinity of three Persons, demonstrates the beauty of a “one another” relationship. He wants our relationships to mirror the relationship within the Trinity, the oneness that exists between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In these lessons we will learn that God *expects* a concern for one another, and He *commends* those who care for one another. God the Son *commands* concern for one another, and He *demonstrates* that concern as our Role Model. Finally, the Holy Spirit *teaches* how to care for one another, and He *enables* us to do it.



LESSON 1

Abraham: Friend of God, Friend to Lot

“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity”
(Proverbs 17:17).

Are you familiar with the couplet that says “To live above with folks we know / Oh, that will be glory! / To dwell below with those we know, / Well, that’s another story!”?

Why is it that we sometimes show more kindness to a stranger than we do to a family member? What makes us smile at the grocery clerk but bark at the kids as we push the cart out the door? Why is it easier to be nice to the people we work with than the people we live with?

Whether it’s the “family members” in the family of God or the family members of our biological families, we are called on to relate to each other in ways that honor the Lord. Abraham is a good example of a man who related correctly to another family member.

Adam had the first opportunity to walk

with God as friend to friend (Genesis 1—3); Enoch was the second man who “walked with God” (Genesis 5:21–24); and Abram (later called Abraham) was the first man specifically called the “friend” of God (Isaiah 41:8). Abram’s friendship with God overflowed into a true friendship with his nephew Lot.

CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER

When God told Abram to leave his country and kindred, He did not rebuke Abram for taking his nephew Lot with him. Instead, God responded to Abram in such a way as to commend his concern for Lot.

1. Read Genesis 11:27–31 and 12:1–4.

(a) Who was Lot’s father?

(b) Why do you think Abram took Lot to Canaan?

AVOID QUARRELS WITH ONE ANOTHER

Friendship between fellow humans is not automatic. Our built-in sin nature hinders relationships.

2. Read Genesis 13:1–7. What problem challenged the relationship between Abram and his nephew Lot?

Proverbs 17:17 teaches that a true friend loves his friends—and relatives—“at all times,” in times of adversity as well as prosperity.

3. Read Genesis 13:8 and 9. What was Abram's main concern about this problem and why?

Abram wanted to avoid a quarrel with Lot, even to the point of giving Lot first choice of the land in Canaan. Immediately after Lot made his choice and departed, God gave Abram an amazing counteroffer. "And the LORD said to Abram . . . 'Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are . . . for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever'" (Genesis 13:14, 15). It could have been God's plan to remove Lot from the picture, but the timing of God's offer cannot be ignored. While Abram took care of Lot, God took care of Abram. In effect, God commended Abram's effort to maintain peace with his nephew by giving Abram much more than he had asked or thought.

4. Why do you think Moses, the writer of Genesis, included these words in 13:7, "The Canaanites and the Perizzites then dwelt in the land"?

As the one whom God had called and to whom the promise of land and seed was given, Abram had a legitimate complaint against Lot. However, he chose not to pursue it. Abram and Lot were followers of God;

they lived among idolaters. Rather than quarrel and destroy the testimony of the Lord before his neighbors, Abram yielded his rights to Lot and trusted the Lord to vindicate his choice and provide for him.

God used Paul to address the Corinthian believers' tendency to quarrel. Apparently some of the believers were going to court against other believers who were defrauding them financially. Paul rebuked both sides of the disagreement with these words: "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? . . . But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers! Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren!" (1 Corinthians 6:1–8)

Uppermost in Paul's mind was the testimony of Christ in the eyes of unbelievers. That testimony was and is more important than personal losses and strained relationships between believers, whether they happen inadvertently or deliberately. We dare not sully the name of the Lord. It is better to suffer personal loss for the sake of the testimony of the Lord than to hurt the Lord's name in a community. Let's not hang out the church's dirty laundry for all to see!

DEFEND ONE ANOTHER

Love for another person can lead to personal risk. Abram's love for Lot led to risking his life and his possessions.

5. Read Genesis 14:1–11 and describe the setting. What was happening?
6. Read Genesis 14:12–16. Why did Abram get involved?

Not only did God give Abram victory over the attacking kings, but He sent Melchizedek, the king of Salem, “the priest of God Most High,” to greet and bless Abram (Genesis 14:18–20). Abram accepted Melchizedek's blessing and paid him a tenth of all he had.

Right after Melchizedek's blessing, the king of Sodom offered Abram a deal (v. 21). “But Abram said to the king, ‘I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, that I will take nothing . . . that is yours’” (vv. 22, 23). He returned the spoils of the battle lest the king of Sodom take credit for making Abram rich.

Abram gave God the credit, or “glory,” for his wealth. Through the divine meeting with and blessing from Melchizedek, God commended Abram for his defense of Lot. He had done the right thing in the right way at great cost and risk to himself. God made up the difference in Abram's effort to rescue Lot, and He honored him.

In the New Testament, God used Paul to commend the Philippians for standing with him in his chains and in his defense of the gospel (Philippians 1:7).

HELPING OTHERS

Many years passed. God continued to promise Abram a son “from [his] own body” (Genesis 15:4) and descendants as numerous as the dust of the earth (13:16) and the stars (15:5). Abram knew that Lot, the nephew he had cared for, was not the son through whom he would be blessed. Eliezer, his trusted servant, was not his heir; nor was Ishmael, his son by Sarai’s maid Hagar.

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, God appeared to him, gave him a covenant, and changed Abram and Sarai’s names to Abraham and Sarah. “God talked with him, saying: ‘As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. . . . And I will bless [Sarah] and also give you a son by her . . . and she shall be a mother of nations’ ” (17:3–5, 16).

PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

Then God appeared to Abraham again.

7. Read Genesis 18:1–8.

(a) What invitation did Abraham offer to three “men” who came to his camp?

(b) According to Genesis 18:13–17, who was the leader of this group?

8. Read Genesis 18:9–23. What twofold message did the Angel of the LORD give to Sarah and Abraham?

9. With whom was Abraham pleading (Genesis 18: 17–32)? How did he express his concern for Sodom? Who lived there?

To intercede to the Lord for another person is to pray for that person. For whom are you praying? Do you care enough for someone to intercede passionately for him or her? Do you know people whose actions will get them into trouble or eventually bring the judgment of God upon them? Do you pray for their deliverance?

God intervened for Lot in response to Abraham's intercession. He honored Abraham's prayer. He also anticipated Abraham's intercession for Lot. Why else would He have shared the news of upcoming judgment on Sodom with Abraham? Much later in Israel's history, when the judgment of God was looming because of sin and idolatry, God sought for another man who cared enough to intercede, but no one was fit for the responsibility.

The apostle Paul challenged Timothy to be a New Testament intercessor (1 Timothy 2:1–4).

10. Read Ezekiel 22:23–31. Why did God seek a man to “stand in the gap” for Israel, to intercede for the nation as Abraham had interceded for Lot in Sodom?

11. If God makes you aware of a serious problem in another believer’s life, how do you respond? From what we have learned about Abraham, how do you think God expects you to respond?

From God’s coming to Abraham and from God’s lament to Ezekiel, we learn that God expects us to pray for each other. God commends those who do. We have a responsibility to one another.

Just as Abraham saw Lot’s need for a home, we should be alert to similar situations with our “one anothers.” Perhaps you know a father who is unemployed or a mother whose husband has left her. Think of ways you can help them.

Circumstances in life may foster quarrels with one another. What are you willing to sacrifice in order to avoid the quarrels?

In other situations, a brother may need your defense. Rather than run or ignore the situation, you may need to stand and defend him. And what do we do when we find a brother living in or very near sin? Will we be one who prays passionately for this brother to be spared?

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Will you continue to be a friend even when you do not see changes in your brother or sister? Lot's life ended in disgrace and shame. He did not seem to understand or respond appropriately to Abraham's efforts to help him. Yet Lot's lack of response did not change Abraham's caring actions. Abraham did what he knew was right, and he fulfilled his responsibility before God.

Abraham was truly a friend of God. His relationship with God extended to his relationship with those who were closest to him, in this instance, his nephew, Lot.



