

Pray like we are friends of God (Genesis 12:1-9, 18:16-33 & Hebrews 7:23-26)

04-Jan-26

Genesis 12:1-9

¹ The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

² “I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.

³ I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;

and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.”

⁴ So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. ⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

⁶ Abram travelled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

⁸ From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord.

⁹ Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev.

Genesis 18:16-33

Abraham Pleads for Sodom

¹⁶ When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. ¹⁷ Then the Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? ¹⁸ Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. ¹⁹ 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."

²⁰ Then the Lord said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous ²¹ 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."

²² The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord. ²³ Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ 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? ²⁵ 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?"

²⁶ 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 spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, ²⁸ what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?"

"If I find forty-five there," he said, "I will not destroy it."

²⁹ Once again he spoke to him, "What if only forty are found there?"

He said, "For the sake of forty, I will not do it."

³⁰ Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?"

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

³¹ Abraham said, "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?"

He said, "For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it."

³² 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."

³³ When the Lord had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.

Hebrews 7:23-26

²³ Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; ²⁴ but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. ²⁵ Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

²⁶ Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

There's a **sermon outline** for you to take **notes**.

Let me **pray** first. Let's pray...

Intro/Prayer is important

In **January** we are doing a **four-part series** on **Prayer**

[Slide-Prayer?]

What is prayer?

Prayer is ***pouring out our hearts to God, bringing every need and thanksgiving to Him, as we draw near in trust and confidence through Christ.***

[Slide-Why?]

Why pray?

Firstly, we pray, because God commanded it:

“Pray continually.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

“Call on me in the day of trouble.” (Psalm 50:15)

[Slide]

Secondly, we pray, because God invites us into a relationship with Him:

“Our Father in heaven...” (Matthew 6:9)

“Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.” (James 4:8)

[Slide]

Thirdly, we pray, because God uses prayer to accomplish His purposes:

“You do not have because you do not ask God.” (James 4:2)

“Ask the Lord of the harvest...” (Matthew 9:38)

[Slide]

Fourthly, we pray, because Jesus prayed and taught us to pray...

“Very early in the morning... Jesus went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” (Mark 1:35)

“And WHEN [NOT IF] you pray...” (Matthew 6:5)

“This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven...” (Matthew 6:9)

[Slide]

Fifth, we pray, because we are dependent creatures

“Apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)

[Slide]

Sixth, we pray, because prayer changes us...

“Do not be anxious... present your requests to God... and the peace of God... will guard your hearts.” (Philippians 4:6–7)

[Slide]

Seventh, we pray, because prayer brings glory to God...

“Ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” (John 14:13)

Hopefully, we are getting the idea that **prayer is important!**

[Slide-Spurgeon]

Charles Spurgeon said:

“Prayer is the heavy artillery of the Christian; it is a person’s chief weapon. The workhorse of the church is not the organisation, nor the committees, nor the schemes; it is the person who prays.”

And

“Prayer pulls the rope down below, and the great bell rings above in the ears of God.”

[Slide-Luther]

Martin Luther said:

“To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.”

[Slide-Corrie]

Corrie ten Boom said:

“Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tyre?”

[Slide-friends]

If we think about – if we want to have a good friendship with someone – we need to communicate – to get to know them – we can’t get to know someone if we don’t talk to them or spend time with them.

To be friends with God – we need to spend time with Him

And one way to spend time with God is to pray.

Abraham was a friend of God

Speaking of being friends with God.

[Slide-Abraham – friend of God]

The only person named as a friend of God in the Bible is Abraham – three times he is called a friend of God (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23)

So, we are going to have a brief look at Abraham's prayer life which hopefully will help us to be a friend of God and help us in our prayer life!

My 1st point this morning is God's friends build an altar and pray!

[Slide-1st point]

God's friends build an altar and pray (Genesis 12:1-9)

Three times early in the story of Abraham we read as in our Old Testament (OT) reading (Genesis 12:8) as well as Genesis 13:4, 18 – that Abraham “built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord”

Abraham was a man on the move, but at each of his stopping places, he built an altar of prayer to God. Commentator Matthew Henry says “Whenever Abraham had a tent, God had an altar”

This is why Abraham was a friend of God – he prioritized his friendship with God!

Do you have an *altar* in your “*tent*” – in your home. A space in your home for you (and your family) – where you can call upon the name of the Lord . Do you have a quiet space to pray? Your bedroom, your study?

As Jesus Himself says in the Sermon on the Mount

“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”— Matthew 6:6 (NIV)

What does it mean though when it says Abraham *called on the name of the Lord*?

The Hebrew word for the Lord here is **YHWH** (Yahweh or Jehovah) – it is the **name for God when people are in a covenant relationship with Him**. It's the name for God which reveals His character and His reputation. Earlier in our OT reading from Genesis 12 :1-3 – **God made some extraordinary promises to Abraham** – Abraham (at age 75) is to **leave his own country and go to a land God will show him** – and God says Abraham will be **a great nation**; Abraham will have **a great name**; and be **blessed**; and in fact **all people on the Earth will be blessed through Abraham!**

So as Abraham prays – He is **praising, worshipping and appealing to the character and reputation of an awesome God** who has **plans and purposes beyond our wildest imagination** and Abraham is **praying to a faithful God who makes and keeps promises.**

By building an altar and praying, **Abraham is making a public statement of faith in the pagan lands he travels through** – and he is **expressing his trust and dependence on God** as he travels to this Promised Land.

For us to “**call on the name of the LORD**” means to **draw near to the Lord** and **pour our hearts out to Him** as he has revealed Himself to us —**worshipping Him, trusting His promises, and declaring our allegiance to Him.**

Prayer is not always about asking God for something – it’s hanging out with Him – enjoying His company – and appreciating who He is!

It’s about a relationship – it’s about being a friend of God!

The more we hang out with a friend – the closer we get!

Likewise, the more we hang out with God – the closer we get!

Having established an altar in our house – it’s a matter of going there **daily** to hang out and pray to God!

Some **practical tips when praying...**

1st – Plan to pray – deliberating set aside some time to pray each day.

Preferably early in the day. If you are playing a violin in an orchestra, it would be better to tune the violin before the orchestra performs, than to tune it after the performance. Likewise, it’s better to pray before the day begins, committing our day to the Lord!

2nd – When we pray – it’s easy to get mental drift [explain] – so we need some practical ways to avoid that – praying out loud – praying through a passage of scripture – or even kneeling down!

3rd - Consider acquiring prayer partners to pray with – which keep us accountable – and which is also very encouraging!

God's friends build an altar and pray!

God's friends pray for others – compassionately, in faith, boldly and persistently (Genesis 18:16-33)

Once we are friends of God and connected with Him

[Slide-2nd point]

Our 2nd point is - **God's friends pray for others – compassionately, in faith, boldly and persistently**

This brings us to our 2nd OT reading from Genesis 18

The context is - there is city called **Sodom** [south-east part of the Dead Sea – modern day Jordan] – which is **ripe for God's judgment**. **Homosexuality** and **sexual promiscuity** were a form of recreation in Sodom!

The sin of the people of Sodom was so outrageous, God planned to send down burning sulfur and wipe out the city! (Genesis 19:24)

When Abraham learned that the Lord was about to punish the people of Sodom; he didn't say "**well that's not my problem**" - he didn't say "**good – it's about time those people got what they deserved!**"

No, Abraham, **prayed with compassion!**

Abraham prayed - v24 - **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?

You see, **Abraham was:**

- Thinking about - His **nephew Lot and Lot's family** who lived in Sodom and who believed in the Lord (2 Peter 2:7-8)
- Abraham was thinking about - **other people** in Sodom **who might believe in the Lord**
- Abraham was thinking about - **the wicked people in Sodom** – that they **might be spared from the punishment they deserved?**

What about our prayers for others?

- No doubt we pray for **our own family members?**
- What about our **spiritual family** – our **church family**? Do we pray for them? Do we pray for the minister and his wife? Do we pray for the leaders of our church and those serving in ministry? All in the thick of spiritual warfare against Satan and his kingdom of darkness? Do we pray for God's armour of protection upon them?
- What about **non-believers**? Do we pray for them by name? Do we pray for our community – for all those who are lost from God – to repent and to be found!

Remember – “**God does not want anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance**” (2 Peter 3:9).

Do we pray for a **revival**? Do we pray for the “**the Lord of the harvest...to send out workers into his harvest field**” (Mark 9:38)

Abraham had **compassion**.

Sadly, compassion for those lost from God was rare among the people of Israel in the OT – ask Jonah for example! The people of Israel were “**God's chosen**

people" and they concluded that **other nations were not chosen!** Yet even in the OT, Isaiah 49:6 says Israel were meant to be a ***light to the Gentiles – a light to all nations!***

Jesus gave His church – that's us - that same job – to tell the Good News of salvation in Jesus **to all nations (Acts 1:8)**

The question is – **do we have compassion for the lost – or have we lost that compassion?**

God's friends pray for others – with compassion!

(pause)

Abraham, God's friend – **also prayed for Sodom – **in faith!****

Abraham **prayed in faith in v25 “*Will not the judge of all the Earth do right?*”**

What Abraham was praying is “***Surely, Lord, you will be fair, I'm sure you won't wipe out the righteous with the wicked in Sodom!***”

I'm sure some of us have prayed for a non-Christian by name for many years but they have remained unsaved! Then we've begun to wonder if God is really interested in bringing them to Christ.

I've even found myself saying to God “***I'm praying for this person, don't you care?***” And so my doubts have mingled with my faith. In which case, it's not really faith anymore – is it?

God cared enough about the person we're praying for - to send His only Son to a cruel cross. Jesus cared enough to pour out His blood and endure God's wrath for us – so our sins could be forgiven!

I don't know why the Lord doesn't always turn people from their sins as soon as I pray about them – but I must come back to this truth – that **God is infinitely more concerned about people perishing than I am!**

George Muller – a pastor and builder of orphanages in Bristol in UK, left a record of more than **25,000 answered prayers**. When asked what his secret was – he said “**Have faith in God**”.

The last two words are important – **IN GOD!**

Our faith **should NOT be faith in prayer itself but faith IN the PRAYER ANSWERING GOD!**

God's friends pray for others – in faith!

(pause)

Abraham, God's friend – also **prayed – boldly**

When God said He would spare the city of Sodom – in v26 – if there were 50 righteous people – Abraham prayed **boldly** “*what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?*”

God graciously replied “*If I find forty-five there, I will not destroy it.*”

Most of us would not have pushed our luck – when God said He would spare the city for 50 righteous people – but **Abraham was bold in his prayer** because **he was convinced that God was his friend!**

Hebrews 4:16 – invites us to be **bold** – it says “*Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need*”

But notice Abraham came **boldly** – yet also with **humility** – in v27 – saying he was nothing but “**dust and ashes**” in the Lord’s presence!

We too can come to God in humility and reverence – yet boldly present our requests to God.

God’s friends pray for others – boldly!

(pause)

But Abraham is not finished!

Abraham, God’s friend – also **prayed** – **persistently**

Abraham prays to God

What if there are only forty righteous people in Sodom? (v29)

Then – ***what if there are only thirty?*** (v30)

Then – ***what if there are only twenty?*** (v31)

Then – ***what if there are only ten?*** (v32)

Some people might say – Abraham was pestering God!

But we are only pestering God when we are asking for something than is forbidden or asking for something not according to His word or His will!

Abraham was persistent – and by God answering “yes” – it encouraged Abraham to keep asking.

Sometimes the fruit falls from the tree easily – sometimes we have to shake the tree!

Jesus Himself says: ***7 “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.***

(Matthew 7:7-8) – the tense of the Greek here is to keep on asking, keep on seeking and keep on knocking!

God's friends pray for others – persistently!

Some **practical ways to pray for others...**

- 1st - Pray through our **church directory**
- 2nd – We have a **detailed prayer news** which tells us who needs prayer
- 3rd – We can have **our own prayer lists** – and **record answered prayer**
- 4th – We can use **apps on our phone to record our prayer lists** – e.g. **Prayminder**

Conclusion - what a friend we have in Jesus (Ephesians 3:20 and Hebrews 7:25)

[Slide-Conclusion-Heading]

Back to Abraham – why did he stop praying at ten people?

We're not told – if Abraham was thinking of his Nephew Lot and his family and household which would be up to 10 people – or whether 10 was the minimum number for a community to be seen to have any righteousness remnant in it?

Either way, **there were not 10 righteous people** – so the city went up in smoke!

Nevertheless, in His mercy, God preserved Lot and his family!

And **God was willing to go beyond Abraham's prayer request** – by sparing the righteous people in Sodom – however small in number!

[Slide-Ephesians 3:20]

We shouldn't be surprised – the Apostle Paul reminds us in Ephesians 3:20

God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us

[Slide-Hebrews 7:25]

Although Abraham interceded for the people of Sodom – he eventually stopped pleading for them. But **in Jesus, we have someone who never stops interceding for us** – as our New Testament Reading from Hebrews 7:25 says Jesus “**always lives to intercede for us**”. That’s fantastic isn’t it?

Now - with Jesus there is always more...

We mentioned at the start that Abraham built altars wherever he went.

An **altar** is not just a place of prayer – it’s **a place of sacrifice**. In the OT, lambs and other animals were placed on the altar as sin offerings and thanksgiving offerings to God.

The NT makes it clear that **Jesus** is our “**Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**” (John 1:29). **All those OT animal sacrifices pointed ahead to Jesus’ once and for all sacrifice for sin on that cruel cross.**

In the OT, the priest making the sacrifices on behalf of the people’s sin was a mediator – but now in the NT – because of Jesus’ perfect sacrifice – **we have Jesus as our mediator** (1 Timothy 2:5). **Therefore, we can approach God through Jesus and pray in Jesus’ Name** - as Jesus Himself taught (John 14:13–14; 15:16; 16:23–24).

[Slide-friend Jesus]

In Jesus, we have a dear friend.

Back in 1855 a man named **Joseph Scriven** was deeply in love and engaged to be married. **Shortly before his Wedding Day, tragically his fiancée accidentally**

drowned. Joseph was heart-broken. From his home in Canada, Joseph, wrote this poem and sent it to his mum in Ireland.

What a friend we have in Jesus,

all our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry

everything to God in prayer!

O what peace we often forfeit,

O what needless pain we bear,

all because we do not carry

everything to God in prayer!

We often speak of Jesus as our Lord, our Saviour, our Master, our Redeemer and our King. **But first and foremost – Jesus is our friend.**

Jesus said this to His disciples “*I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends*” (John 15:15)

As friends of God – we have the best friend in Jesus – and it is a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer - in Jesus’ Name!

I pray we would be encouraged to set up an altar of prayer in our homes this day and pray and pray and pray... Let’s pray.

Heavenly Father, thank You that we can come to You as friends, bringing our hearts, our needs, and our prayers. Teach us to pray faithfully, boldly, and with compassion for others, trusting in Jesus who intercedes for us. May our lives glorify You as we build altars of prayer in our hearts and homes.

We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.