

1. The two readings of this morning both deal with prayer. Praying is hard, especially in our time: there are many distractions, such as our mobile phones and tv's. We can see that it is hard because the number of people attending prayer meetings is low.

One problem we have is that we may have a wrong idea of God. This sermon will contain some encouragements to pray.

2. As an aside: Did you notice that Abraham is not after revenge on his enemies? He rather prays for them! He is here already a blessing to the nations, as God had promised him.

3. When I invited Dawn to read for us this morning, I asked her to read Genesis 18 from verse 20. But when I studied the passage, I noticed that this was incorrect! We need to read verses 16-19 as well. This is where God invites Abraham to intercede on behalf of Sodom; and in verses 20-32 Abraham responds. The LORD first shares his intentions with Abraham and encourages him to pray for Sodom.

This is a great thought: God invites us to pray as well! He seeks our company. That is why he created humans in the first place. He involves us in the rule of the world. God is surely faithful to his promises, but his plans are not set in stone.

God is not a slot machine, prayer is not a matter of inserting the right coin. God wants our love. And he is open to our involvement – so get involved! Pray!

Think of the story of Jonah, when the Ninevites repented and God did not destroy their city. As someone said, 'God rules the world by means of the prayers of his children.'

In this he is entirely different from the Buddhas you see in so many garden centres, nail salons and on windowsills: Buddha is unmoved, aloof. God is involved, he listens to his children. What an encouragement to pray!

Prayer is much more than submitting a shopping list, though! Our God desires our intercessions, but also our praise and worship. He made us for communion with himself – which is what prayer is.

5. You might say that it was easy for Abraham to pray, because God had come to meet with him. That is true and it is much harder for us. As I said, the time in which we live has many distractions. We need to make the conscious effort to put our mobile aside, to switch off the tv. Some people can talk well with God during a walk in nature. (That depends on whether the dog you are walking is docile and well-behaved.) Do find out where and how you pray best.

6. Prayer is not a monologue: we do hear back from God. Sometimes he speaks directly to us, but I am by nature and through experience a bit suspicious of these direct messages. God speaks primarily to us through his Word, through Jesus and the written word.

If we listen to him and speak to him, prayer can be our spiritual breath.

That prayer is more than intercession, is also seen in the Lord's Prayer. We first praise and worship God, then we confess our sins. Surely prayer is more than a series of requests for ourselves.

God invites us to pray, as he invited Abraham – can we refuse this request?